One Earth Sangha

Deepening Engagement Together

Alan Senauke in conversation with Kristin Barker

This is a transcript of a conversation between Kristin Barker and Hozan Alan Senauke on April 2, 2017 to participants in a One Earth Sangha community webinar. Watch the video here.

Kristin Barker: Let's dive in.

Hozan Alan Senauke: Okay. Well, I had some preliminary thoughts or musings, one from an exemplary non-Buddhist source, and then looking back at context in Buddhism and in Zen Buddhism. But I want to start with the last sentence of Darwin's On the Origin of Species. The first edition was published in 1860 and this is the last sentence. And it's really interesting because it's the only place in the entire book where he uses the word "evolve." It's actually the last word in the book. He writes:

> *There is grandeur in this view of life with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning, endless forms, most beautiful and most wonderful, have been and are being evolved.*

"There is grandeur in this view of life." There's a grandeur in that statement. And of course, one of the conundrums we face is that we have a picture of where we are in the universe, of what our place is, what we're doing. We have a pretty good, although not complete, understanding of our biological history and our geological history. In a presentation by Bill deBuys at Upaya Zen Center last month, he said, "In spite of our self-knowledge, we continue to destroy the universe of which we are part." And he also asks, "How do we maintain commitment in the face of continuous loss?"

These are really pressing questions; they're political questions, they're spiritual questions, they're existential questions. So to turn to the Buddhist tradition — and here I'm reading from a document that is on the One Earth website, a Western Soto Zen Buddhist statement on the climate crisis, issued in April of last year, and I was one of the authors of this:

> *As Buddhists, our relationship with the Earth is ancient. Shakyamuni Buddha, taunted by the demon king Mara under the Bodhi tree, before his enlightenment, remained steady in meditation. He reached down to touch the Earth and the Earth*

responded, 'I am your witness.' The Earth was partner to the Buddha's work; she is our partner, as we are hers.

From Buddha's time, our teachers have lived close to nature by choice. They've stepped lightly and mindfully on the Earth, realizing that food, water, medicine, and life itself are the gifts of nature. The Japanese founders of Soto Zen Buddhism spoke with prophetic clarity about our responsibility to the planet and to all beings. In "The Bodhisattva's Four Embracing Dharmas" Zen master Dogen, the founder of Japanese Soto Zen Buddhism, wrote — and the context for this was the context of generosity or giving — "To leave flowers to the wind, to leave birds to the seasons are the activity of dana, of giving."

To leave flowers to the wind and leave birds to the season. I think, in his historical moment, this was a kind of mystical expression of the obvious, of what was already true. In our historical moment, these are actually live questions: are there going to be any flowers that are left to the wind? Are there going to be any birds that are left to the seasons? And what's our responsibility to that? One of his successors who, like Dogen, built temples in a remote part of Western Japan, wrote, "Ever since I came to live on this mountain, I've particularly enjoyed the presence of the pine trees. This is why, except on festival days, not a single branch must be broken off. Whether they are high on the mountain or in the bottom of the valley, whether they are large or small, they must be strictly protected." So this is the responsibility that Keizan Zenji felt for the pine trees that were his neighbors, I think recognizing that they were protecting him and his community.

So this is a very broad picture of relationships that we have at this moment of time. And I come back to this question: what is our commitment in the face of this continuous loss? I very much have been affected by a recent book by Roy Scranton called *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, in which he raises these same questions. Maybe we'll get to that later in the conversation, but this is enough for an introductory context, which I think may lead us in more concrete and particular directions.

KB: Thank you so much, Alan. I'm particularly touched by this overall idea, you said it quite explicitly at the beginning, this overall idea of being in partnership with Earth, from the beginning of this tradition. And then having seen the ways that that continues to show up in the tradition and thinking about that as a true refuge, a true resource for us, the lessons of the Earth, the lessons of nature and our raw experience, if you will, of having that visceral sense of interrelatedness. So, thank you for that. I would like to give everyone the benefit of hearing a bit about your own journey, Alan, how you first came to Dharma practice, and then maybe how the understanding of a socially engaged practice

was woven in. Was that integrated from the start? If not, how did this come to be so fundamental to your expression as a Buddhist leader?

HAS: Sure. Well, I think that my introduction was really in high school, reading Chinese and Japanese poetry. What I responded to in that poetry at that point in time, and still, is that there was a profound respect for the ordinary, that there was a sense that in the ordinariness of life — which, in their context, invariably referred to the natural world — that in ordinary things, there was something transcendent, some deeper dimension than we would take for granted in our quotidian activities. I got that from that poetry, and that led me in the direction of wanting to understand more about Zen. It began as a kind of literary and philosophical resonance, and after a time realized that then there was something you needed to do with your body. At that point in time, and I'm talking about the late sixties, it felt to me, at least the way I was understanding Buddhism, that there was a disconnect between the activism that I had grown up with, as an urban, educated fellow in the sixties, there was a tension between this kind of mystical dimension of Buddhism and the activist dimension of social change. I didn't see any integration, and that was possibly my lack of imagination, but there were not very many people who were making that connection in 1968. I mean, there was Gary Snyder who was making all the connections as early as that, but that was kind of it. And so it wasn't until I came back… I tried to practice Zen and I couldn't, and I immersed myself in an activist life and kind of hit the wall.

It was not philosophically nonviolent. The era of the seventies was terribly violent and very destructive on all parts, including the eradication of a whole level of political leadership in the African American community and other communities. And I kind of ran out of script in my life, and that was the very early eighties. And that's when I reread things that I had encountered in Buddhism in the sixties and the seventies. And at that point I walked back into Berkeley Zen Center and I was home. And when I walked into Berkeley Zen Center, I found that there were quite a number of people involved here who had strong connections with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, which had been founded in about 1978 by Robert Aitken, Nelson Foster, Joanna Macy, a number of people, arguing for social engagement as a legitimate expression of our Buddhist practice. And so when I walked into that, it was like, oh, right, here it is. These people have put these elements together, I'm with them. And so, I was kind of a fellow traveler for a number of years, and then, very, very fortunately, fell into the position of what became Executive Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in 1991 as the first Gulf War was unfolding. You know, I feel like my whole present and engaged Buddhist life comes from that and from connections that flow from that kind of happenstance.

KB: Great, wonderful. So, even thinking about that time and your coming back around and finding a home at Berkeley Zen Center and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship... In our conversations, as we were preparing for today, one of the things that you mentioned that struck me was that you said that it feels like today you meet with much less resistance in speaking about the intersection of what we might call political action or collective action and a Buddhist path. Can you share a little bit more about that shift and, maybe what that's been like, to give us all who are still working with that to some degree, some perspective on that?

HAS: Well, we're all working with it because one of the great things about Buddhism is that things change. I would say when I started at Buddhist Peace Fellowship, which was like 26 years ago, I felt that Buddhist organizations and Buddhist teachers often — not entirely, but often — looked at us somewhat askance, looked at what Buddhist Peace Fellowship was putting forward as kind of leftism in Buddhist clothes, not as any integration. Even though one of the great inspirations at that point in time was found in the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh, who really did not make that separation and who was a great and important supporter, and of other teachers, of Joanna Macy, of Robert Aitken, but still, there was a skepticism. We had our own magazine, Turning Wheel, which was a wonderful magazine, very broad in scope, edited by Susan Moon, but other than that, the Buddhist publications at that time, to my recollection, nobody ever called us and asked us about our point of view or analysis on social issues or on anything else. It was just like, oh, these guys are weird and they're sort of over in the corner. But what's happened is that the values that we and others put forward — the teachers I've mentioned, the work of Bernie Glassman, the work of David Loy and many others of you, probably, some of you who are out there listening — brought this just front and center into the communities that we live in. And so there began to be a view certainly of service, and sometimes of social action as a legitimate expression of our interdependence.

And I think, beginning to develop this idea more widely, an idea that we were evolving in Buddhist Peace Fellowship about engaged Buddhism. And I wanted to read something very briefly, that might serve as an introduction. "What is socially engaged Buddhism?" This is from an article that Donald Rothberg and I wrote, and it's in my book, *The Bodhisattva's Embrace*.

> *What is socially engaged Buddhism? It is Dharma practice that flows from an understanding of the complete and endlessly complicated interdependence of all life. It is the practice of the Bodhisattva vow to save all beings. It is to know that our liberation and the liberation of others are inseparable. It is to transform ourselves as we transform all our relationships in our larger society. It is working from the inside out and from the outside in, depending on needs and conditions. It*

is to see the world through the eye of the Dharma and to respond empathically and actively.

And I would add, it's also to see that the reality of suffering that is fundamental to the question or the operation of Buddhism, often manifests itself in the context of systems. So, systems of oppression: racism, gender oppression, also systems of exploitation, of exploiting the planet as well as exploiting individuals. And so we had and have this view that we're looking at systems of suffering, but we're recognizing that every system of suffering is made up of individuals, there are individuals in that system. So you're constantly going back and forth. Sometimes you may need to work on the system, and sometimes working for social change is actually working with an individual who is in that system. But everything is not reduced to an individual basis, which I think was one of the things that we contested in Buddhism, the idea that all you could do was change yourself. You know, that may be true, but it depends upon your definition of what the self is. The self is not necessarily limited to what I think of as me within this bag of skin. It also includes, right now it includes everybody unseen to me in the circle of this conversation.

KB: You know, as you're speaking, I'm reminded that the founder of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka said, "The struggle for external liberation is the struggle of internal liberation from greed, hatred and ignorance, at the same time. Yet this internal and external liberation are fairly separated when regarding our sanghas and social change movements, respectively." So we have our sanghas largely working on internal liberation and our social change movements working on external liberation. So if Ariyaratne, this founder of the Sri Lankan movement and early Buddhist community organizer, was able to see this connection so clearly, what do you think we're missing here? That is, what are the obstacles and solutions to integrating these struggles, seeing them in the way that you're describing as really deeply interconnected? What do you think we're up against?

HAS: Well, I think what we're up against is the ideology of individualism. At least this is what I think we're up against in this country. And it's very interesting because we're up against something historical, deeply historical. This is my analysis. In the Buddha's time, to go back 2,500 years, a person's value and identity were deeply determined by caste, gender, location, occupation, ethnicity, and so forth. There was a ladder of value and worth often based on those factors. One of the radical moves of the Buddha in his vision of interdependence was that we are all, and all aspects of the world, are co-creating the situation that we're in. So, this is an argument against some fixed kernel of self that's in oneself that is eternal and goes on from birth to birth. So what he posited in his sangha was that one's value as a person was not based on birth or social position. It was based on one's thoughts, words, and actions. So, he said, one is not a Brahmin by virtue of birth.

One is a Brahmin by virtue of action. One is a noble person by virtue of actions. So what he posited that was very radical for his point in time was a kind of radical individualism, which cut across the grain of the social determinism that was the rule. Okay, let's jump ahead 2,500 years. So here we are in this country where there are these deeply, deeply imprinted values of individualism, which one could argue against in a certain way. One could say, well, we have the illusion of individualism. But we really have the illusion of individualism, you know, it's very deep in all of our American values. So it may be that the liberative perspective, in our point of history, is not more radical individualism, but actually seeing as Aitken Roshi put it in a late fable that he wrote. Somebody asked one of the characters, "What are right views?" and Aitken Roshi said, "We are all in this together and we aren't here very long." So it may be that Buddhism for our point of history is not radical individualism, but a collective vision of our collective fate and responsibility. Every culture, every generation has to define for itself what is liberative and not go back to chapter and verse. And I think that Ariyaratne sees that, Thich Nhat Hanh sees that, Dr. Ambedkar sees that, Joanna Macy sees that. To me, these are my teachers.

KB: Yeah. And it's part of that connecting to what is, and responding skillfully. Of an appropriate response.

HAS: That's right.

KB: Beautiful. This sounds a lot like what I think you've written about before. On par with the Protestant notion of a social gospel, developed in the early 1900s, you've called for the development of a social Dharma, where we respond skillfully to social and systematic ills.

HAS: Well, I think it's having its day. It's rising now.

KB: Yeah. So, can you say more about that Dharma and what it emphasizes? You've said some of those things. And then also how we as practitioners — you know, we are in this community, on this call, who will be listening to this recording. We are practitioners, we are activists, we are longtime sangha members, we are sangha leaders, we have administrative roles, sometimes we offer the Dharma itself, we are part of this community. So what do you feel, tactically, we can do to actualize, to realize that appropriate response, the shift away from hyper-individualism (that's a Joanna Macy phrase) and towards this more social Dharma?

HAS: Yeah. You know, it's interesting. I've been thinking about this in terms of Christianity, you have the social gospel which arose in the late industrial revolution as an ameliorative approach to religion, which recognized there were all these social problems. It's good. It's a really positive force, but let's remember there's also liberation theology,

which is not the same thing. Liberation theology has a radical bent. And I think this is a tension. It's obviously been a tension within Christian and other religious theology, but I think we have it also in the sense that, you know, everybody wants to be good. Everybody wants to be a good person, a moral person. But I think the thrust of liberation theology and the thrust of the engaged Buddhism I am thinking about goes further. It points to renunciation. I think that there were parallels in the social gospel. There was probably a sense, like some of us have, that we could have it all, that we can be good people and not give up something. I'm thinking about a quotation from Paul Ehrlich, who people remember from the population bomb, a really, really important thinker, he said, "To support the world's population sustainably, you would need another half planet. If everybody lives like us," meaning us in America, "you would need another four or five Earths."

So what does social gospel, what does social Dharma mean? It comes back to, I think, a Buddhist principle of renunciation. And this is a radical step. There was always the option of renunciation that was available for people who wanted to take a monastic path. But I think we're asking something beyond that in terms of liberation Dharma. And this is a challenge that I face myself. I have a nice life. I can look behind you, Kristen and it looks like a nice house that you live in. I'm sitting up in my very comfortable office and the question is, can a lifestyle like we occupy be available to the whole world? I don't think so. And if not, then what is one's responsibility to that? That is a real difficult question. And I don't pose it with any judgment, or to guilt trip people or to guilt trip myself, but it's a constant question: how are we living? And it's not just a question of, do I have a hybrid car? In a really fundamental way, I think a lot of it is where does the energy — and I mean that in a literal sense that sustains civilization — come from? And unless we renounce certain kinds of things, we're not going to be able to change the essential ground of civilization, which means that it will probably, like Trump is so fond of saying about Obamacare, civilization can explode of its own or implode or collapse sooner or later, and that will be on our children and their children. And first and foremost it will come down on those who are most oppressed.

KB: Indeed. And it's so interesting that the Buddha in his time was teaching renunciation as a path to happiness. This wasn't about environmental sustainability. This wasn't really even about social justice. It was actually a path to true contentment. So you've said that, "declarations and tinkering with policy will not bring about the change we need. Particularly in relation to the climate emergency we cannot go forward on an implicit assumption that our quality of life and consumption will continue as is." This is kind of what you were just speaking to. That "we have to find cleaner sources of energy and that's that. This is not possible." So my question is, environmentalists have a long history of telling people how to live, a lot of finger wagging and guilt tripping, if you will, making

people feel bad about the economic systems that we live in. And telling people, you know. Environmentalists have been really good at shaming people about that, and guess what, it doesn't work very well. And then on the other hand, the Dharma offers this very open, obligation-free invitation into durable happiness. The Buddhist invitation, if it doesn't make sense, you go elsewhere, you know, try it yourself. If this leads to more happiness, then continue to follow this Dharma.

So how can this imperative that we have to bring about systemic change really for the sake of future generations and this kind of life that we know on Earth, anything like it, be matched with the Dharma's understanding that conditions have to be just right for wisdom to emerge, for someone to step into the Dharma and move forward, and that's very much their own, very much start where they are. How do you connect those?

HAS: I've been thinking about this a lot because I don't really have an answer, but I think there's something in this book by Roy Scranton, Learning to Die in the Anthropocene. The title points to it: "learning to die in the Anthropocene." And he says, "If, as the philosopher Montaigne asserted, to philosophize is to learn how to die, then we have entered humanity's most philosophical age, where this is exactly the problem of the Anthropocene." And then he goes on to talk about his own experience. And I'll make the connection. In a Zen samurai manual in the 18th century, it reads, "Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily." And Scranton says, "I took that advice to heart. And instead of fearing my end, I practiced owning it." And he was a soldier in Iraq.

> *Every morning after doing maintenance on my Humvee, I would imagine getting blown up, shot, lit on fire, run over by a tank, torn apart by dogs, captured and beheaded. Then, before we rolled out through the wire, I'd tell myself that I don't need to worry anymore because I was already dead. The only thing that mattered was that I did my best to make sure everyone came back alive. To survive as a soldier, I had to learn to accept the inevitability of my own death. For humanity to survive in the Anthropocene, we need to learn to live with, and through, the end of our current civilization. Change, risk, conflict, strife, and death are the very processes of life and we cannot avoid them. We must learn to accept and adapt.*

I think that when we talk about leading to happiness, it's a tricky question, because a lot of what I see in Buddhist practice, and I certainly see it in Zen practice, is learning to die. And not that we look forward to it or think that that's happiness, but to learn to be at ease, more than happiness, to be at ease with the circumstances of our life and to adapt so that the circumstances of our life cause us and those we are connected with the least suffering. You know, we have this expression, 'die on the cushion,' and Suzuki Roshi talked about: with each exhalation, you die, and with each inhalation, you come to life.

And this is to me the process of our practice. So I mean, it opens up a whole lot of questions. This is not exactly an answer to the question that you asked. It's how I'm trying to think about this so that I can be free from the urgencies and unuseful anxieties of living so that I have the capacity to turn to the suffering of others and do whatever it is that I can. At the same time to turn to the systems that are creating the suffering of others and address them as directly as we can.

KB: Yeah, I really like that emphasis, it sounds like an emphasis on ease and freedom, not being caught and trapped by my fear of death, my fear of what's happening, my fear of climate change, but to actually be with it and to be responsive to it for myself and for others.

KB: So let's go into the second session here. Here we are, right, in this incredible moment that Lou spoke to in the beginning, that we're all really feeling as a community. I'm seeing in my interactions with community just a really deep shift. And so, I'm wondering how you view this most recent election, without getting off into the... we don't want to go into political analysis, right? There's a lot of people doing that when we are here to keep this grounded in Dharma and the intersection of Dharma and this political environment. So how are you looking at this? Is this an incremental shift, is it a fundamental shift in our culture and our challenges? How are you looking at this?

HAS: I don't think it's a fundamental shift. I think it's the eruption of a reality that has been there for a very long time. A candidate and a position emerged that just incredibly encapsulated every fearful view that people might have in this country. And what it uncovered was the degree of fear that exists. To me, it's mostly fear. The greed belongs to the corporation and the politicians; the fear or hate or aversion can be owned by all of us, as is the delusion that one person or one party or one perspective can somehow eradicate all the fears that people have. So, looking at it through the three poisons, I can see it that way. There is nothing new about everything that's being expressed, but it's really being brought to the surface. And in a sense, maybe that's good, but it's really, really painful and 'good' is a very subjective word because it's not good. It means that people will die because of decisions that are getting made. People will die, species will die. All of this will happen on the basis of executive rulings. So it's not good in that sense, but in the sense that the contradictions are surfaced and in the sense that it sets up the possibilities of deeper discussions, that's good. But we have to be able to have those discussions and not fall into polarized views, or not describe the people who voted for one position as deplorable.

KB: So let's talk about that for a moment, because I'm particularly interested in the ways that, in some cases, we replicate the oppression that we're trying to address within our own movements, in ways that are by definition difficult to detect, else we wouldn't replicate them, we would see them more clearly. So I'm just wondering, the progressive left is right now unifying around this message of resistance to the current administration. And I wonder if you could say what you think the contribution of the Dharma is. Does the Dharma have any wisdom to offer that resistance? Struggle, which is just so important — I am certainly not criticizing that — but I just wonder if there are, any, maybe not just the obvious, but more subtle teachings of the Dharma that we might bring to bear on this moment that can actually help us transform our collective situation, transform ourselves. You know, what is that Zen koan? "The sickness is medicine." You know, how can what we're going through really transform us? And as followers of the Dharma, what can we keep in mind and really support each other in remembering?

HAS: To me, I think it's that all beings are Buddha. This is a very difficult teaching. And I think the correlative of that is that this very body is the Buddha: my body, your body, Devin Nunes's body, Betsy DeVos's body, they all are manifestations of Buddha. That's a very Mahayana perspective. And at the same time, each of us has these coverings of greed, hate and delusion that keep us from seeing Buddha or Christ in ourselves. So that's the teaching. You may or may not be able to get to that. You may not, it's hard to get to that really deep understanding oneself, and it's even harder to convey that to someone who has no interest in it, but it is a reality that we hold and we can see. So, I think it goes back to Martin Luther King's teachings, which, of course, are rooted in both Christian and philosophical traditions. His argument was basically, you love everybody for their human nature, but you don't love what they do. You resist what they do, particularly you resist it if it seems in opposition to life.

So, I think the resistance is based on that, but it's not based on eradicating the understanding that everyone can awaken. That's at least the beginning. So that kind of throws you back: you still have to decide what it is that you're resisting. Also, Kristin, you made a really important point at the beginning of what you said, which is that we have a propensity for replicating the very distortions and problems that we're seeing. And, some of us of a certain age, maybe many of you, lived through this. I lived through it in the sixties. I lived through political movements that really saw meeting violence with violence and all that led to was imprisonment, death, fear, not so much to change. And there were movements that I wish I had been more involved in that were based on religious principles, that were based on resistance, but they weren't based on violence towards individuals or hatred of individuals. They were based on the deconstruction or intervention in a system itself. We have to figure out how to be more skillful at this.

KB: Great. I want to ask you one more question. You did the book with Don Rothberg, but you also had an article that I found on engaged Buddhism again with Don Rothberg, and in that you offered this framework of "study, act, practice patience and compassion." Study, act, practice patience and compassion. Can you fill those out for us? As you and I have talked a little bit before, with everything that's been happening, more and more there are people who are like, I'm sold, you know, I'm ready. I'm ready to be more uncomfortable. I'm ready to put more time into this. I want to reprioritize and maybe renounce, I want to get in there. What can that look like? What's the way to make the really nitty gritty? What would you recommend folks do at this point to really actualize the things that we're talking about here?

HAS: Well, let me reframe those principles even more simply, and this comes from my teacher, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the principal figure in the untouchable conversion movement in India, who I read a lot and whose work has been transformational in that country and still is transformational. And he said, "educate, agitate, organize." Which happens to be also, I think, principles of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). So that's even simpler. So educate: we have to study the conditions and circumstances that we're in, we have to study the political system, we have to study the Dharma. Agitate means to advocate. This is what the resistance is. The hard thing is the organize, because it's been hard on the left over the last 20 or 30 years. We fragmented. This is not a problem of Buddhists. It's an endemic problem in American political culture and all the other cultures. It's fragmented into special interest groups without a common understanding of the problems and the systems that we're confronting. And so we need to, in very practical ways, organize.

Some of us are thinking about organized models. We've evolved something, some friends around here in the Bay Area, over the last six election cycles, which we call an election sesshin — which is kind of a Zen model but it could be adapted for anyone — where we go to an election district where there's a significant congressional election, and we set up a house, a meditation hall, a schedule, and we maintain the schedule for two weeks. And after morning meditation and mindful breakfast and cleaning up, we'd go out and we walk precincts for six or seven hours every day. And then we come back and we debrief. So we're organizing ourselves, we're building a community within the larger community and putting forth these principles of educate and agitate. Right now, just to say to all of you, we're mostly done with creating a manual and we're looking towards the next primary season in the 2018 elections. So that this is not just an idea that a bunch of people in the Bay Area are doing, but an idea that we concede and help people do in their local areas and that's organizing. And just today, we have made a significant difference in elections. The candidate we worked for, the Democrats did well in Nevada, where we were working this year. And we knocked on something like four to five thousand doors,

and that means we're talking to people, so that's also recognizing the Buddha nature in each person. So that's just one idea, but I'm throwing it out because it's a really live one for me.

KB: That is one idea and it seems like an idea that could be taken and modified to be not just around election cycles as well. I do want to weigh in here on one piece of this. When we talk about renunciation, when we talk about privilege, what we know doesn't work is a sense of feeling guilty and bad about that. That actually is internal domination in a certain way. And what I am keenly interested in right now is how we, playing with perception, really put into action what Alan spoke about before in terms of every person is a Buddha and what must we do to confront systems that make otherwise, that actualize, that create domination, rights that are themselves loaded with my right to dominate.

If you ask Joanna Macy if she's going to fly somewhere, she's like, yeah, I'm flying. I'm flying because I'm doing this work to take apart a system that exploits the planet. And so, going back to something Alan said earlier, part of our movement out of the hyper-individualism is to put our privilege to work, is to put our assets to work, to undo these collective, hugely oppressive systems. Because if we just work at the individual level, even with our own renunciation practice — which we need to do, because we need to live it in order to speak to it — but if we let it stop with that, or we get hung up in that, and not address the systems, we're actually passively participating in harm that dwarfs the harm that we're causing with the lack of our individual renunciation. So it's very tricky and it takes, as Alan was saying before, great organization, but it is the dismantling of these collective institutions and their harmful practices and replacing those institutions, creating new rules, new policies that have embedded in them this respect for life in all of its forms. So that's my little piece that I wanted to throw in there.

HAS: What I would want to add very briefly is not to underestimate that the process that Kristin was just talking about and I have been talking about is a painful birthing process. It will be painful. And this is exactly where we need each other, because our resilience is not just a personal quality. It's also a quality that we can offer to each other. Because in every respect it will be painful and will be incomplete, we may feel lost or overwhelmed.