



One Earth Sangha

Session Six: Core Offering

Approaches and Practices

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2022-23 Video

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Session Profile

Session Six: Creating and Discovering The Way

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Speakers in this video

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

Transcript

Introduction

Kristin:

Okay friends, so to complement the main video that's part of session six, we're gonna follow up here and ask Adam just a few questions. Adam, I wanna start with what are the practices and habits that we can think about bringing in here to specifically support us at this stage of the EcoSattva training as we make this turn?

Adam:



So in this part of our journey of moving from uncertainty, groundlessness, dark night of the soul, into some new light, something emerging, there's a number of practices and, really, skills or qualities that are helpful.

One is the continual practice of listening. And listening is something that we need to train in. Many of us are really poor listeners. We don't listen to ourselves. It's hard to listen to the people we love. It's sometimes difficult to listen to our broader society and difficult to listen to the earth. And cultivating the ability to listen is itself a journey. So in the Shambhala teachings and inspired in part by [Otto Scharmer](#)'s work, we sometimes talk about four stages of listening.

The Practice of Listening

The first stage is listening from within our own habitual mind and fear-based ego. And when we listen within that kind of cocoon, or armoring, it's very difficult to hear anyone, let alone the cry of our planet. So through mindfulness and through meditation we learn to open to a second kind of listening. Which is listening to others, but here that we are aware of others but really we are listening just in terms of do they agree with me or not? Is this fortifying my position, or does it go against me? So here at least we're listening, we are aware of others or other situations, but we're really just listening to sort whether it kind of aligns with our worldview or not. And the EcoSattva needs to extend beyond that kind of listening to our third form of listening, which is less polarized. And this is empathic listening, of listening with our heart. Listening with our whole being. And that leads to the fourth and final listening, which is listening ourselves and our world into its own wisdom. This is a generative listening. So if we're each wondering, what is it that we want to offer to this earth? How do we show up as EcoSattvas in this moment in our life? Out of this deep rest of uncertainty we also need to cultivate this deep listening, this capacity to hear what it is that really will call us. And it's this song that pulls us out of ourselves.

A lot of American Buddhism, or Western Buddhism, or modern Buddhism, emphasizes a kind of self power. A will power or an effort or an exertion, or something we're doing ourselves. I think at this stage in the journey, we need to open to something really beyond ourselves. In the theistic mystical traditions, this is often described as a kind of a mystical presence or a divine theistic presence. If we don't have a connection with that kind of imagery or language, we can think of learning to listen to what it is that the earth is asking for from us. If that sounds too dualistic, we're learning to listen to what the real, what reality is asking for or from us.



Beyond listening, this is a stage where we need to be nimble, supple and kind of playful in trying stuff. In Otto Scharmer's language, from the Theory U teachings, we emphasize rapid prototyping. Instead of working out your completely perfect EcoSattva foolproof methodology to change the world forever, and having every single one of your ducks in a row, just try something small. See if it works. See if it inspires others. And if you get feedback from a phenomenal world and from other people that it is working, move forward. If you get some critical feedback, if it totally fails, then learn from that. Don't be afraid to be a fool. Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

Kristin:

Thank you, that's great.

Staying with the Questions

Kristin:

And how do I work in that emergent space with this sense of self that shows up, that can feel either disqualified completely from everything that is necessary, that feels so necessary to bring to this, or somehow under qualified, I don't have the skills or background or whatever, or maybe even over qualified? So I've come from this nonconceptual space, how do I work with that self that feels still so uncertain and then maybe even insecure, in that way, of where I fit in?

Adam:

So in some ways, on our journey of the Dharma and of the EcoSattva, it's easier to deconstruct the self. To let go of identities. To let go of certainties. To enter the unknown. And it can be almost impossible to think about what it means to re-arise. To reestablish a certain subjectivity, to emerge in a certain form. And the truth is it's quite dangerous. Because we easily can just co-opt that re-arising from an egomaniacal perspective. But, you know, most of us aren't terrible egomaniacs. Most of us are actually just doing our best and trying.

So what it can feel like to get trapped on this re-arising part of the journey, is a kind of inner chatter and conceptuality where we're doubting ourselves, or wondering what is it that I can offer? I'm not an ecologist, I'm not a community organizer, I don't have enough time in my life to do much, I'm not a philanthropist, I don't have enough money to offer, I don't want to get in battles with people. You know, so what is it? Who am I? What can I offer? So it feels entrapping and kind of neurotic when we're trying to figure it all out. Where we're always doubting ourselves, we're trying to know what is it that's our unique gift. But it feels somewhat, I think, if not joyous, at least there's some kind of inspiration that can take hold when we inquire into and stay with the question, what do I really want



to offer? In my heart of hearts, what am I longing, and really, what would bring me a feeling of wholeness, balance and engagement?

The EcoSattva Path

Kristin:

Alright, terrific. So, Adam, I have one more question for you, which I just wanna open up the space for you to share. How do you frame the EcoSattva path? How in particular can we think about in an ongoing way, mixing contemplation and action? Because that has been so much the ways that our community has been working with engaged Buddhism.

Adam:

The recognition that this is a tension that is alive in each of us, is such an honest and helpful starting place. And by this tension I mean this kind of starting to feel out in our own being how much acceptance, letting go, releasing, how much rousing, engagement and action, and to know that sometimes we'll go to one extreme or another. And you could almost have a very intentional practice of getting up in the morning and coming to your place of – if you have a corner of your room, or a meditation room, or some place where you do formal practice – you could actually almost speak words to yourself aloud saying, "I am trying to discover what it is to be an EcoSattva, and I don't know how much to just collapse in exhaustion, and how much to rouse myself, but I'm longing to discover, I'm longing to know what it is to emerge." In other words, to make conscious, and somewhat bring into our awareness that we are all struggling with this, rather than kind of burying it as, well, a background that is haunting us. Really bringing it into our practice fully. And even saying, today I will practice mindfulness and awareness meditation, or love and kindness in a metta practice, in order to cultivate this EcoSattva way of being. So that's just the first thing. Acknowledging this is difficult territory. This is really the profound mystical journey of the Dharma, but now under very extreme material, political, ecological contexts. And being clear about that with ourselves, knowing that we are taking this up as our practice, itself is very, very profound.

Having done that, I think I would like to offer four specific steps to just make this as kind of as communicable as possible. Any time you hear four specific—or seven specific—you know, it's just a finger painting. There's never four or seven, there's always many. But here are four.

Developing Kindness towards Yourself

The first is a quality of friendliness or gentleness towards oneself in this emergence. And recognizing the extent to which, as soon we think of spark or action or now I am going to



return into the world of form, very quickly we reverse old habits of judging ourselves harshly, of constant inner criticism and inner chatter that's saying you are not doing it well enough, you're not fast enough, you're not really emergent, you haven't really passed through the dark night of the soul, or you're not really helping the world, you're a hypocrite, you don't really care about the earth because you still drive a car. All that inner dialogue, inner conceptuality, and the emotional and physical somatic tension that comes from self-aggression, all of that can be released. It does not help the EcoSattva. It does not help the Bodhisattva, the spiritual warrior. So the first practical practice is to rely on our beautiful teachings of self-care, of mindfulness, and of working with our inner critic and our self-aggression.

So I would like to officially dispel all self-aggression from the EcoSattva archetype. It really serves no purpose. That self-judgment, and self-aggression, if it really led to tremendous action and beautiful engagement in the world, we would have no problem. Because there's so much self aggression. but it turns out, it doesn't work like that. The more we trap ourselves in a kind of pattern of judging and comparison, we're not really an environmentalist, we're not really a good Buddhist, the more we find ourselves grinding ourselves down into a further paralysis. So the first kind of, practical, I think, instruction is, discover a kindness towards yourself. Really become your own best friend in this journey. Recognize the vast history we are up against. And that it's not any of our faults. And to find kindness and care.

Cultivating Strength and Health in Your Being

Second, I think we each need strength. And a quality of cultivating strength, a certain joy of discipline, a healthiness in our being where we're taking care of our body, we're taking care of our life, we're taking care of our state of mind, it really matters how we are training ourselves each moment. As we emerge from the darkness, it requires a certain kind of vigor, or energy, or life force. So don't be afraid to cultivate strength and health in your being.

I think some of us feel like if we're really are going to be EcoSattvas, we need to just be a mess all the time, or sloppy and racing or, you know, somehow not caring for ourself. But here I don't mean self care as in the more popular sense of babying yourself or something. I mean strengthening. I mean, seeing your being as a kind of samurai sword that your hammering and honing and that the struggles that we go through are actually adding to that strength and that life force in our own being. So we need kindness and gentleness towards ourselves, but we also need to develop a certain strength. A certain health. As if we are preparing for a very long journey.

Part of emergence, I think, is discovering what that strength means for us. If we're going to be creative, there has to be a wellspring that we're dipping into. So, for many of us that means time outside in nature. That means our meditation practice. That means Qi Gong and Tai Chi and Yoga. That means watching our diet. That means really finding a way of being, a habit you could say. A healthy spiritual habit. The word habit is interesting. It means habitus, a kind of way of being. Or a habit you could say, that we perform and enact. But in monastic tradition, a habit is the clothing that you wear, the kind of virtue that you show through even how you dress, how you act. So actually taking care of our homes, our apartments, our spaces, our clothing, our bodies. Developing a strength to be an EcoSattva, to stay with the trouble requires a certain energy.

Cultivating a Vast Mind

Third, we need a really vast mind. A non-conceptual mind. The mind of the absolute or the ultimate. The primordial. Noticing all the ways that as we pick up this new inspiration, we decide we're a hospicer or trailblazer. We find this new spark. Very quickly that becomes a new story, a new identity, a new ego, a new concept. We find ourselves once again racing through the maze, moving really fast, convinced that we're right. So this third element is the how on conceptuality. Which feels like we are willing to, in a moment, let go of even this new found certainty of our EcoSattva-hood. So if you meet the Buddha on the road, kill the Buddha. Zen saying. So if you meet your EcoSattva identity on the road, kill the EcoSattva. Don't cling to this new amazing identity that you've now created. That just becomes more spiritual materialism or more ego-hood.

So, have a kind of spacious mind and non-conceptual mind, and study the teachings on emptiness, on selflessness. Look at the Prajnaparamita literature. Look at the practices and methods from our own teachings that open us. Spend time in silence. Go deep into your meditation practice. Find a well spring of peace and of nourishment in the absolute nature. Without that, the EcoSattva is just another person scrambling. So in the Bodhisattva path, from the Mahayana, there is this emphasis on prajna, I think Lama Willa mentioned this, that it's a direct recognition of emptiness or of the absolute nature, the non-conceptual groundlessness that fuels our generosity, our discipline, our patience, our exertion. Without the wisdom, without the openness and vastness, then our action just tend to just peter out and we find ourselves exhausted again. And that will happen. I mean that happens to all of us. So then once again, you exhaust. You let go. And you rediscover, you reattune to the song of the earth. You rediscover this – these new senses, this new heart. And that leads to the fourth point, fourth step here of the definitive four absolute true statements.

Touching Joy and Delight

And the fourth one is, a sense of joy, sense of humor, playfulness and magic that, if we're attuning to this new song, it will probably be delightful. It will probably feel full of love and of magic. It will probably feel like you have a deep time perspective. That is a little bit more light-hearted than just trapped in the freak out. And so, don't be afraid of the joy. Don't be afraid of playfulness. Don't be afraid of sense of humor. We need some really good galley humor, galleys humor, for the collapse of our civilization and for the Anthropocene. We need much better jokes about the total loss of species and of life on the planet. So, let's delve into our various ancestral heritages and find a kind of joy and delight as our world ends. And with that, I think, comes, with spontaneity and sense of humor, it's much easier to tune into the magic.

When I've been out on the land, I don't get a message from the forests, the frogs, the moss, the mountains, that say be more uptight. Be more self-righteous. Be more vicious. I get a kind of sense of, hey you're humaning. You are all humaning. You're each being as human as you can. So, to review, be gentle and kind toward yourself as you emerge from the darkness. Find strength and develop a life force, health and vigor. Attune to and open to a true non-conceptual absolute openness, beyond hope and fear and concepts and identities. And a playfulness. A sense of humor, and a lightness of being that allows us to stay with the trouble, and move with a certain kind of joy and magic.

And all four are available to us at any time. An EcoSattva enters into a situation not knowing, and then asks, do I need more gentleness? Does this situation need more humor? Does it need a more vast perspective and emptiness? Or does it need more strength? And it could be in any order, and it could be cyclical and it's for yourself, and it's for other situations and other humans and for the planet.

Dana

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