

Welcome - Session One

Lou Leonard, Kristin Barker

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2024-25 Video

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Session Profile

Session One: Arriving and Setting a Course

[Session Resources](#)

Speakers in this video

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

Transcript

Welcome from Lou

Lou Leonard:

Hello everyone. I'm Lou Leonard, co-founder with Kristen Barker of One Earth Sangha, and welcome to the EcoSattva Training. As we begin this journey together, I want to share some reflections on three questions. First, why is being part of this training important? Second, what does it mean to be on the path of an ecosattva? And third, how can we face these challenging times skillfully? I've spent my adult life within the climate



and environmental movements working for the US government and in the private sector on natural resources and energy issues, serving as head of climate change for a global civil society organization, and now leading a university school of sustainability to prepare the next generation of environmental and social change leaders. But it's in moments like this one when I have the privilege to join you as we launch a new edition of the EcoSattva Training that feels like one of the most important things that any of us can do.

So why is this work like the EcoSattva Training so important? Well, I believe that the climate crisis and the other social and ecological crises that we face are at their root, emotional and spiritual crises. Of course, there are important scientific, economic, cultural, and technological dimensions. But what stands in the way of a safer, more healthy future, more than anything else, I think, is how our hearts and minds react to these crises and how that reaction affects how we respond, how we choose to engage in these times. So the fact that you have chosen to participate in this training to take on this root cause is all too rare and so vital. Thank you.

So secondly, what does it mean to choose the path of an ecosattva? At its core, I think it means intentionally choosing to face the enormously complex and often overwhelming times in which we live, not merely being subject to the regular onslaught of bad climate or social news, but deliberately choosing to turn towards our world and respond with wisdom and care. This sounds simple, but we know it's not for we live in extraordinary times. Times of violence in Ukraine and the Middle East. Times of fire and flood in North Carolina, Florida, Australia, Brazil. Times of political instability with half of the world holding general elections this year, including of course in the United States where I am. Being an ecosattva means cultivating ways to turn towards these more enormous challenges. In doing so, you may find as I have that hidden within the bigness of these challenges, in fact are the keys to facing them. Because these challenges are so big, we cannot hope to face them through a small, overly individual sense of self. They can only be held within expanding hearts, open minds and caring community in sangha. And the good news is cultivating those qualities is something we know how to do, something we will do together in this training.

One of the things that makes this work so hard is the way the ground seems to be shifting under our feet so constantly. It can be hard to feel that we can make any sense of these crises, let alone respond. Just a couple of years ago, we seem to be waiting for climate change to arrive and trying to elevate painful social crises, questions of equity and justice long deferred onto the global and national agendas. Now here in 2024, often it feels to me



that we have both made hugely important progress on climate justice, racial justice, economic justice, but also at least sometimes my mind tells me it might be too late, whatever that means. I find this new reality in some ways much more complex to hold than when we were collectively working to deliver the Paris Climate Change Agreement, for example, or build the Black Lives Matter movement. If we achieve those important milestones, I hear my mind say, results we thought might solve these problems and the challenges seem to only grow, will we ever succeed? So this brings us to our last question.

How can we face the ever-growing risks and prepare ourselves to stay engaged and respond appropriately in these times? Because in this moment, perhaps our greatest risk is that we move from a culture of denial to one of despair, or worse, resignation. As we live the extreme reality of climate and social crises every day, it can begin to feel commonplace. We become numb to the truth or our overly adaptive human selves reset our sense of what is normal. As anger and fear arise, which they will, we risk falling into a mindset of blame, maybe even hatred of others of ourselves, even of all of humanity. As conversations begin to include more discussion of climate retreat, planetary hospice, can we watch how we relate to these topics? Can we maintain an open curiosity, a precondition for creativity rather than shut doors in our minds around what is possible? Can we leave room for the idea that we are making progress? Can we continue to care deeply through it all?

Effectively turning towards these hard questions I think requires four capacities, which we will develop throughout the training. First, the endurance to stay connected to the growing harm and suffering in our world without getting stuck in despair or numbed resignation. Second, the steadiness to face the inherent uncertainty of this age, the complexity of the transformation we are attempting without getting stuck in confusion. Third, the determination, some might call it faith, to let ourselves care so deeply and give ourselves fully to this work without getting caught up in needing to know whether we will succeed. This is a hard one for me. In other words, without getting overly attached to outcomes, we can see and touch our results that seem tied to our own individual efforts. And lastly, I believe we need the buoyancy of heart to keep joy and awe accessible by truly accepting ourselves as a small but vital part of an extraordinary living earth community, by feeling a sense of wonder and belonging that comes with being connected to a growing movement of life, responding in these times.

You might notice that these capacities aren't ones you can develop in a typical laboratory or courtroom, though that kind of work is needed too. These are capacities of the heart



and mind. Cultivating them is not about reaching external milestones, but layering on strengthening and nurturing ourselves and each other. This training is a place designed to support that kind of transformation, a journey that can sometimes feel individual, that can only truly be done in community, in sangha. Because we cannot do this hard work alone. I'm so deeply grateful that you are here to walk this path of discovery, this field of cultivation together. I'll now turn it over to Kristen who will say more about the specific elements of the training. Thank you so much again for being part of this with us. Kristen.

Welcome from Kristin

Kristin Barker:

Thank you, Lou, thank you. It's so good to be doing the training again with you again this year. And I just want to start out by saying welcome, welcome to each and every one of you. Welcome all of you to the EcoSattva Training. I want to welcome every part of you, whether you're excited to be doing this, whether you're a bit hesitant or unsure, whether you're really enthusiastic, relieved, even. Finally, we're doing this, finally we're talking about this. Or maybe you're just feeling reserved. I want to welcome all parts of you, including with respect to the larger situation we find ourselves in. The angry, the scared, the stuck in anxiousness, the grieving, definitely the scared, definitely the grieving. And also perhaps the guilt ridden, the ambivalent, the numb. Let's recognize and welcome all of those parts. So very understandable, so very unattended to in the wider culture, unspoken, sent underground. Let us recognize and even honor all of these parts and be interested in them. Give them our attention even in this opening space. So let all those parts be welcomed here, those named and unnamed by me in this opening video. Let them all be welcomed, even those that can't even be named, the hard to articulate, the hiding under the carpet. Can they be welcomed even if they are only vaguely sensed and included in this space?

I want to welcome not just all parts of you, but all kinds of you. We aspire to welcome all gender identities and orientations, all racial and ethnic identities, whether predominant or part of the mix that is you. All abilities that are welcome here. I want to welcome you whether you are new to Buddha Dharma, mindfulness practices, or maybe you've been doing this for a very long time. Whether you're new to One Earth Sangha, or maybe you've been with us in our community for some time. Whether this is your first encounter with the EcoSattva Training or whether you've done it before and are returning perhaps with new friends to take this journey again, or maybe you're actually facilitating a group in this.



You are welcome. All of you are welcome. Whether the places in you and the identities that are part of you feel an easy connection to these kinds of spaces or whether that's difficult. I want to welcome all these identities, the parts of us that go underground and make sure that they at least have the invitation to belong. I am so grateful for you taking this journey at such a time. We are bringing what we hope will be skillful means to support your experience and sufficient safety. And yet we will falter, we will falter in that aspiration, especially when it comes to the limited ways in which I and Lou and our team do not see and appreciate and understand. I invite you to share with us what needs to be changed here, both in form and content that will support your sufficient safety, belonging, and the unfoldment of what is on offer here.

So whether you are part of a group, a sangha, a dharma center, or taking this training as an individual, we are so grateful that you are here. We come together here amidst a great acceleration in the manifestations of ecological crises. Just as Lou was saying, we are finding ourselves in a very unstable, uncertain moment. Life on earth has always been uncertain, but this uncertainty is now for life as a whole, and that is deep and difficult to be with. Underway for decades, if not centuries, if not millennia, the reality of inescapable human caused changes in earth's life systems is, if you will, now undeniable.

So why are we doing this? Why Buddhism? Why mindfulness? Why this? It bears asking with all the work that needs to be done, why would we spend our time here on these kinds of questions, these kinds of cultivations with your time and energy, you could be doing so much. Why spend it here? Well, because of the power of our minds, our perceptions, our conceptions about who and what we are and what we need about the outcomes of our pursuits. These we submit play an outsized role enormous in what is happening right now with life on earth. The human mind and these aspects of mind, play an enormous but largely misunderstood role in our predicament. In dominant culture, these are my people. We are confused. We are confused about our very nature, about what we actually need to be well, and what we need to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

I'm using the word we hear, but of course, I'm speaking only about those who like me in these ways and that needs qualification, especially given the enormous unearned privileges that have supported me throughout my life. Including a stable climate, my race, my economic status, my abilities, my health, citizenship, cisgendered identity. As a queer woman, I have only a marginal sense of systemic marginalization. So I want to be careful



in ways that I will inappropriately generalize, and worse, normalize my experience. Rather, I wish to speak to and about my people. Those of us here who have been conditioned, not by choice, by the way, into this way of looking, that separates and objectifies self, other and world.

So we come together to investigate the role of heart-mind in poly chitta. These heart-minds are so available, so responsive, so amazing, and so subject to conditioning. It is astounding to me at least, with all of our astounding capabilities, that even as we see the manifestations all around us of nature in trouble, of life on earth really under in the midst of a big pinch, this culture, we just can't seem to extract ourselves from this extractive relationship with earth and her precious beings. And this to the detriment of all that truly sustains us, at core what we most deeply love.

So that situation might make us who can see it in these ways or choose to see it in these ways, it might make us angry, mystified, overwhelmed, terrified. Yes, yes. But with a certain kind of attending and even honoring of those responses, we can be interested in how this would become. What would give rise to such a situation, the enormous influence of human perception and response. So we situate ourselves in bringing together to this moment on earth, Buddhist wisdom and practices that have been over the ages, adapted and interpreted and interact with the cultures as they move around the world and arrive here in what we might call modernity or western culture or the dominant culture. The Buddhist insights into ways that mind constructs our sense of ourselves and what we need, what we think we need, we suggest has enormous implications for this moment on planet earth. These teachings, again, we submit, are largely untapped, largely untapped for their potential to support us in understanding with compassion and accountability three things. How did we get here? How can we possibly be with this? And what might a truly helpful response look like for us individually and collectively?

Those three questions we suggest are worthy of our time and attention and exploration, curiosity, and investigation, including the mistakes we habitually make about self, other and world. Supporting ourselves in clear seeing and the compassion that can so easily arise with clear seeing. What I have noticed again and again in my life, the power of clear seeing. The power when we really understand what's happening in our own hearts and even the heart of another, we can quite naturally abandon that which perpetuates harm. I didn't even know that I was contributing to harm, and now I see it and ooh, I don't want to do that. No one had to convince me, no one had to judge me. Because it turns out people don't like to be judged. We kind of resist that in all kinds of ways, but with clear



seeing, the veil falls and we see that which perpetuates harm and also naturally pursue that which truly helps priority shift.

So in this space, we begin by turning towards what is so unwelcome in so many settings, which is the topic itself. This thing that goes unspoken, the silence, the unskillful silence that is so much a part of this. We begin by naming and speaking and moving into and bringing yes compassion to the difficult emotions, but also then curiosity. We look at the underlying causes and as well the complex interactions that make what we might call the poly crisis, as has been named, I think beautifully by so many others. We explore the ways of looking and the practices that can root us deeply. Amid shifting sands, amid shifting sands, one's roots have to go deep to remain stable in this enormously uncertain time, being a human on planet earth right now.

These teachings and practices will be explored with the help of tremendously gifted and courageous teachers, as well as practices and inquiries, and you'll see all that in the next video. I'm going to talk about all of that as well as give you a sense of how this will unfold. But in the face of the forces that would have us shrink and close and attack and defend and protect me and mine and my own, we believe that it is essential to cultivate and nourish hearts and minds that are expansive, open, steady, generous, clear, and fiercely without bias. Compassionate. These noble qualities need support to arise and develop and expand. We aspire to offer here just that, the support for your Bodhisattva, your wise heart-mind, that generous want for the wellbeing of self, other and world to arise and develop.

So thank you for undertaking this, for supporting yourself. And even if you're doing it as an individual, supporting one another. We are giving ourselves a language and a community around this. We don't do this alone, okay? And let's just say it is a strange thing to be offering these teachings about connecting with earth over prerecorded time delay digital media. Can we just embrace the irony of that? We do hope that you will join us in the real time monthly live gatherings that build community for all those who have taken the EcoSattva Training and are currently part of it, and that we hope that you who are in small groups really explore. And the next session, we'll talk a lot more about this, but really support yourselves and one another and giving yourselves time to land and situate and get to know each other and support that which is so underserved in my culture, in dominant culture, the development and support of rich and meaningful community.



So on behalf of Lou, again, welcome from both of us and from the team at One Earth Sangha, the amazing team at One Earth Sangha. We look forward to your participation and to your feedback, and we really mean that. We want to hear from you, how it's going, how we can make what we're doing here supportive, such that you can participate fully. So in the next video, I'll give you a sense of the arc of the journey and what the sessions look like. But for now, welcome, welcome, welcome. Thank you.

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.