Responses to Climate Change: Awareness, Action and Celebration

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 53:23

So as promised, climate change—one of the reasons that we are here, one of the central topics of our focus in this time, in this era.

We're moving into our second segment of the morning with James Baraz, who you probably are all fairly familiar with. James has been central to the transmission of the Dharma in the West, and most specifically here in the Bay Area, starting many sitting groups and being a co-founder of this beautiful place, Spirit Rock, and author of a book called *Awakening Joy*. If you need some joy, I highly recommend it. James is going to introduce his co-presenter here, Bob Doppelt. They're calling their segment, "From Me to We: Five Dharma Principles That Could Save the World."

Well, it's so heartening and moving to see everybody here and to have this day together. I think this is a really significant day for us, for our community, for the greater Dharma community. I just want you to know that what you're doing here, people know about far away, too. Email wishes from two teachers in England, Catherine McGee and Chris Cullen. Tara Brach sent an email yesterday saying, "I hope it's a really great day, really successful day." Their communities and a lot of people know what we're doing here.

It is significant because it's our community coming together, taking refuge in the Sangha. This is one of the three jewels. And I think if anything can make a difference, it's all of us coming together to inspire, motivate each other, get in touch with our caring, with our concern for the planet. The more there's a kind of critical mass of people aligned with that intention, both in the Dharma community and, of course, out into the world, then there's a possibility of actually making a difference, making a real difference.

As one friend, a very wise friend and teacher, says, we're in a race between fear and consciousness. I think in the long term, consciousness always trumps fear. However, the question is, is there a long term? And just what's the timing on this? So all we can do is the best we can do and have as much consciousness spreading and addressing the fear. And I think what we have to offer here as Dharma practitioners and lovers of consciousness is something special that we have to offer to this whole question addressing our love for the planet.

The more we can come, as has been said and how Malcolm so beautifully articulated, and I know Joanna so beautifully articulates, the more we come from love and care and equanimity, as well as feeling all of our fear and all the emotions that come up, but not to lead from fear, to lead from love after we've

processed all of our concern, the more magnetizing it is for everyone. So I think our dharma practice is key not only for ourselves, but for what we can contribute to the greater question.

I wanted to share that this is something that for a while has come more from practitioners than from teachers. There are a few teachers that are here today, particularly Wes and Donald and Mark and a number of teachers who have been really concerned and articulating so beautifully their care and inspiring others. But many, many teachers have been more focused on intensive practice. We're in the middle of a shift right now. And I want to share with you that shift that you can make a difference in.

At Spirit Rock, we're going to have an international Vipassana teachers' gathering in June, which we do every three or four years, either in Gaia House or Insight Meditation Society or here. It's coming up, and we're going to have it here in June. Mark and I and a couple of others, Sharda Rogel and Catherine McGee in England, are the organizers, and we get to help create the agenda. One of the main agenda items is going to be our role in the coming years, particularly addressing climate change. The role of teachers, the role of our community, the role of the Dharma. What do we have to offer as things start to become more and more important?

One of the things that we wanted to do that affects you or that involves you is that there's a letter that was written up first in England by Catherine and Chris and a couple of other people that is now being spread among various sanghas. Catherine McGee, who's a Gaia House teacher, has gone around to various sanghas as a kind of... You know, the Magna Carta, when the Magna Carta was brought to the king in 1215 from all these different communities saying, we want democracy. Well, we're having different sanghas sign this letter encouraging the teachers for guidance and teachings around this and taking a leadership role, as is customary in the traditional teachings that the students or practitioners request teachings.

If you've ever been to a monastic retreat, you know that the student, one of the students says, please, can you share the Dharma? And when the students request, then the teachers respond. This is a request for teachers to not only reflect for themselves, but to bring some guidance and teachings around this question.

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blow up as you just at the bottom of the steps for you all to sign and also to take home—there's copies that you can take to your communities and friends either your formal sanghas or your dharma friends petitioning and requesting for teaching and leadership on climate change.

I want to just read to you the letter so you have a sense of it and you don't have to block while everybody is reading it if there's online.

"Dear teachers, the scale of the challenge presented by climate change is perhaps unprecedented in human history. Already it is a cause of immense destructive suffering to many species and ecosystems and to many of the poorest and most vulnerable people on the earth. The world's most respected climate

scientists are unanimous that we indeed live in a time of emergency in which urgent action is needed.

We feel profoundly grateful for the teachings of the Buddha Dharma, and we believe that they have a great deal of wisdom to offer not only to Buddhist practitioners, but to wider society at this time of immense challenge. Spiritual and moral guidance is needed if we as a human society are to respond adequately and appropriately to this emergency.

We are therefore writing to ask you for your leadership, guidance, and teaching as we seek to explore the relevance of the Buddha's teachings amidst the crisis that we face. Together, we need to find a wise, engaged, and active Buddhist response. We wish to encourage you to reflect deeply, both as individuals and as a teacher body, and to speak about this issue and give guidance.

We hope that the forthcoming teacher meeting at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in June of 2013 will provide an opportunity for teachers to discuss this issue as a matter of priority and to begin to formulate wise collective responses on behalf of the Global Insight Meditation community. As members of this community, we are ready to engage with you as you do this.

With thanks and appreciation for your sharing of the Buddhist teachings in a world that needs to hear them."

And whatever your signature, you can write. If you want to write your own version of it or share some of your own thoughts, then please feel free to do that. And we're going to present this to the teachers. We'll have thousands of signatures. That's the idea for the teachers to say, "Oh, you know, it's like hitting your send button to move on," and hoping that your senators will get it.

I would like all the teachers to see how much this community cares and our greater community cares about addressing this. So I invite you to please take a look and sign it and take one home.

And now it gives me a great pleasure to introduce to you Bob Doppelt, who is an old friend. We first sat together in the 80s up at Breitenbush. And he's, besides being a longtime Dharma practitioner, one of the leading Dharma voices that is making a difference in this issue. He is the executive director for the Resource Innovation Group, which is based in Oregon. He teaches at Willamette University, and he's on the faculty of University of Oregon.

And he's also one of the organizers of this group collective called the National Climate Ethics Campaign, which is comprised of 135 organizations, 18 of which are working with the White House these days. And he and his group are actually coordinating these meetings. He's going back and forth to Washington a lot because the administration has it on their agenda as a priority. However, with all the other priorities, it's slipping lower on the priority list, but it's still on the priority list. And they're working to craft a narrative for people, for our country and our population to see, "Oh, this is something that affects me. I want to be part of this."

So it's not often that we have a Dharma practitioner that's making a difference in where it counts. And he wrote a book called "From Me to We." It's a fabulous book. Unfortunately, the copies that were supposed to be here didn't arrive in time. But it is a book that I've given a series of talks on in my Berkeley group. It's about five Dharma principles with the subtitle "The Five Transformational Commitments Required to Rescue the Planet, Your Organization, and Your Life," put in a very non-jargony, accessible form for the general population of what's going to be needed to shift our consciousness and our action to make a difference in saving this planet and loving this planet for as long as we can.

So I'd like to hand it over to Bob now to share his philosophy and perspective on this.

Well, thank you, James. Thank you. It's wonderful to be here. I come here often for retreats, and it's nice to see all of you here on this Earth Day, and especially an Earth Day focused on climate change, which in fact is an extremely pressing issue that we all face, are going to have to deal with, are already dealing with, and certainly our children and their children are going to be dealing with. This is going to be the issue that all future generations have to adjust to.

What I do for a living is work with local, state, and federal government agencies and private organizations trying to help them think about and learn about ways to address these kinds of complex social, ecological, and economic issues. In the work I've done, I kept trying to find a way—a simple framework to help organizations and people realize the kinds of changes they need to make in their thinking and behavior to really become or adopt a true path to sustainability.

So the framework I'm going to share with you today has really emerged out of many years of experience. And what was remarkable to me was one of those "duh" experiences. I've been practicing socially engaged Buddhism for 25 years and not really connected it to my work on sustainability and climate change issues till 10 years ago or something.

And I realized the dharma principles are in fact the principles that we need to use to make this shift, but most people aren't really going to embrace the dharma right off the bat, especially if it's presented in Buddhist language or Buddhist jargon. So what I've done is tried to put this into a mainstream framework using mainstream language that I want to share with you today.

I'm going to go through this quickly because we don't have a lot of time, but I want to first start with a very simple way to think about the problem of climate change. This is a picture of what's called the Blue Marble—the very first photograph of our home, Earth, taken by the Apollo 17 astronauts in 1972. It's the first picture we ever had of ourselves hanging out there in space.

Now, I want everyone to take a very close look at this picture and see if you can find any intake valves that would allow us to bring in extra resources if we contaminate the ones we have or use up all the ones we have. Anybody see any? None. Now look very closely for the pipes that go away from the Earth that allow us to get rid of our toxicity and pollution and waste—those discharge pipes. Anybody see any there? No.

The Earth is a partially closed system, which means we take in solar radiation and reflect some of it back out into space. Some of it's captured in the mix of gases that surround the Earth, and the gases that are trapped create the heat that make life possible here. Other than that intake and outtake of solar radiation and a few meteorites every now and then, the Earth is a closed system. Everything we make, everything we do stays right here in our biosphere or in our immediate atmosphere.

What climate change is about is that we have actually created an anthropic breakdown of the systems we are part of and created too much growth—too many greenhouse gases that are building up in the immediate atmosphere and warming the Earth beyond what has existed for the last 10,000 years. But it's not just greenhouse gases. Through extensive forestry, converting forest lands to agriculture, filling wetlands, and so forth, we have also undermined or degraded nature's ability to sequester carbon. So we have both a source and a sink problem.

One way to think about the problem is always to think about the Blue Marble. Every decision you make, every product you buy, every time you use energy, any time you use a material, every technology you support or policy you support—ask yourself: How does it affect this closed, semi-closed system that is the Blue Marble?

As James just said it very well, I think we are actually in a race for time now between the growth of consciousness—which is really the growth of awareness of our connectedness with others and the growth of empathy and caring we're going to have to demonstrate in order to address this issue—and the growth of this entropic breakdown that's happening on the planet. The question is: which is going to win out?

I think we have no choice but to make sure that the growth in consciousness, the growth in empathy, the growth in caring for other people and the natural systems that created them and support them and created us and support us wins out. That said, we're also in line for some very difficult times ahead. We're going to hit roughly two degrees Celsius—3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels, from what we can tell. The question really is: can we keep it from going beyond that and into runaway climate change? So we've got some tough times ahead.

I want to share a framework that I think could help you think about a way to make this shift in thinking and behavior, and how you can also help others do the same thing. Because I think it's really important that we move beyond ourselves. First, we have to start with ourselves, but then we have to move beyond ourselves and motivate other people that we work with, our families, the organizations, and ultimately the institutions of society that really are controlling things.

I'm going to suggest that there are five interrelated commitments that you can think about to make this shift to increased empathy, increased caring for other people and the systems they're part of. None of these commitments are new. The Buddha talked about them 2,500 years ago. Many other religious leaders have talked about them, and the physical and social scientists describe them today. But they haven't really been put into a framework that I think the average person can understand.

These are really important principles today because they help us align our thinking and behavior with what I call the natural laws of sustainability. That's my own term for a set of universal truths that are going to be essential to follow—to learn how to interact with each other and the planet today if we're going to make this transition, come through this very difficult time that lies ahead, and come out the other end by managing global warming. We're not going to eliminate it. The best we can do now is manage it and then come out at a much better place down the road.

I'm also going to emphasize commitments, which are vows. Commitments reflect our sense of purpose, our values, and our priorities. We're going to have to make some very critical choices about what we're going to do and not do, what we're going to as a society allow and not allow through laws and regulations in order to manage this issue.

And we expand our choices by altering our interpretations of the world—or as the Buddha said, by seeing through the illusions that control our minds and seeing reality for what it is, being truthful about reality. That's what I hope these commitments help us do.

So I want to start by just having you, if you would, for those willing, relax into your body a bit. If you want to close your eyes, you can. Just take a few deep breaths and relax, let yourself settle in, let go of any tensions that you might have, and become aware of your breathing.

As you know, focusing on our breath is a way to concentrate our minds. But it is actually much more than that. I invite you to pay attention to what's actually happening within your body as you take in that breath. You're inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide. Most of us don't realize that it is the oxygen we breathe that actually creates the energy that allows us to live. Oxygen metabolizes the food and water that you eat and drink and turns it into energy. Oxygen actually is the most important aspect of life. We can live for a long time without food and water. We can't live very long without oxygen.

Now think about it as you are aware of the breath that you're taking, and try to find out where this oxygen is coming from. What is the source of this oxygen that you're breathing that is allowing you to live right now? Well, about seventy-five percent of it is created through photosynthesis with green cells and green algae and bacteria in marine environments. And the other twenty-five percent of the oxygen you're breathing in right now is created through the same process—photosynthesis and vegetation all around you.

So complex interactions occurring in the oceans and in the estuaries and in vegetation are creating the oxygen that are allowing you to live right now. Just become aware of that. Try to trace in your mind and see if you can feel that oxygen coming in from these other sources and you're exhaling the CO2 that is absorbed by many of those same processes. And then try to ask yourself, how conscious are you of those processes? Every time you take a breath, do you give thanks to the oceans and the vegetation all around you? Of course, most of us don't. That's not something we normally do, but that is reality. This is how life on our planet actually functions.

Here is a fundamental truth: nothing exists on its own on this planet. Everything is created by and sustained by other processes and organisms. This is a core dharma principle and what in mainstream language I call the natural law of interdependence, which is the first and most important natural law of sustainability as I think about it.

In Buddhism, we call this emptiness and dependent origination. Nothing is a solid entity in itself. All things are dependent on multiple causes and multiple conditions. Anatta, or no-self in Buddhism, means that since all things change—our thoughts change, our feelings change, we're breathing oxygen in and it's going out as CO2—there is no such thing as a separate or permanent self. We, in fact, are just mediums through which energy is concentrated for a short period of time through our lifetime, and molecules of food and water and oxygen pass through, pass in and pass out.

Can you become aware of that as you follow your breath? Just how these molecules are entering and passing away, passing out of you. There is no permanent or separate me.

Now if you would come back and notice your own pattern of breathing and become aware of your immediate surroundings. If you would like to open your eyes, come back to the room.

The Buddha said we can give ourselves no greater gift than increasing our own awareness, and no greater gift to another than increasing our own awareness. So give yourself thanks for increasing your awareness of how interconnected we are.

If you are not constantly aware of the complex web of social and ecological systems that created you and sustain you, and create and sustain all other life on Earth, you're likely to do more harm than good. Said differently, if you're not constantly aware, trying to increase your awareness of the true context in which you exist, then we'll do more harm than good.

So the first natural law of sustainability is the law of interdependence. The dharma principle is emptiness, dependent origination. And the commitment then is to see the systems you're part of—to always strive to see the context in which you exist, the systems you're part of. It's very hard to see all the systems that we're part of.

We often have difficulty seeing the vast systems that sustain us. It's hard to perceive the oceans creating the oxygen we breathe. But there are practical tools we can use to develop this awareness. Systems mapping is one such approach. When I work with organizations, I have them map out their social systems on paper. With my college freshmen, I teach systems thinking and have them map their family system, their school system, and the ecological and economic systems they're part of.

If you haven't explored systems mapping, I encourage you to try it. It's a powerful tool that helps organizations truly understand the interconnected systems they inhabit. Unfortunately, most people today don't think systemically. We live in a culture of what I call extreme individualism that has grown for many reasons over the years. We believe we are freestanding, independent entities. In fact, at my college,

there's an entire school of economics teaching that we are all separate entities with no responsibility for anyone else—that we should pursue our own economic self-interest without concern, and everything will magically turn out for the better.

A little experience and insight reveals this isn't true. Consider the financial collapse of 2009, when the financial industry pursued its own economic self-interest without considering the broader economic system it was part of, collapsing the entire world economy. Or here in the U.S. and other parts of the West, where we've pursued our economic self-interest by burning massive amounts of fossil fuels, destabilizing the climate system we're intimately part of. This way of thinking simply doesn't work.

We have confused self-centeredness with individual self, and consequently, we are all much less free. All of our children will be much less free in the future if we continue this path.

This brings us to the second natural law of sustainability: the law of cause and effect. Everything happens based on what emerged before it. In today's overcrowded, over-consumed, overheating, and super-connected world, everything we do creates the conditions for what will be possible in the future. This is the Buddhist principle of karma. What we do matters. Your actions have consequences. Everything has causes and conditions. The deeper you go into this understanding, the greater your awareness grows.

The commitment here is to account for all the consequences of your actions. Of course, just like seeing systems, it's difficult to account for all consequences. We often don't know, and sometimes there are unintended consequences we couldn't predict. But tools can help. Have you ever used a fishbone diagram? I have students do this exercise. You place the problem or action you're about to take at the head of what looks like a fish skeleton, then move backwards, outlining all possible consequences that might happen. These simple tools help expand our awareness.

It's never possible to understand all consequences of our actions, but as the Buddha taught, the key is to increase our awareness—always striving to expand our consciousness. This is really about right intention and right thought, becoming aware that we have choices. If we truly want to manage climate change to manageable levels, we must make different choices. This begins with understanding the systems we're part of, then being conscious of what our impacts mean for those systems. This is why we practice meditation—to increase our awareness and clear our minds.

I'd like you to take a journey with me now. Imagine that a genie has swept you away from your everyday job, your house, whatever you do for a living or with your time, and made you the most powerful decision maker on earth. Just play along with me. At your fingertips is any information you want to make any decision, and whatever you decide will happen. Actually, many of you would be excellent as the most powerful decision maker on earth, but bear with me.

There's a catch. This genie has given you a unique form of amnesia. You can't remember your name, where you live, who your family is, your nationality, religious status, or financial status. You don't

remember anything about yourself. All you know is that whatever you decide will happen.

Now, how would you make decisions under these circumstances?

What's happening right at this very moment? Be here now. I would consult the wisest people I knew. Okay, so you would consult wise people. But wait—do we have any memory of what we already know or knew? No memory, because we don't know who we are.

Anybody else? "You'd want to help everyone." Wanting to help everyone—good. Okay, I think we have one more. Go ahead. "You don't know the consequences, so how would you make decisions?" Right, exactly. Okay, one more. "Use the seventh generation principle." Use the seventh generation principle—excellent.

I think all of these responses are getting at the core of it. You would adopt some decision-making model similar to the age-old moral rule called "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"—the golden rule. Because those others might be you, right? You don't know who you are.

What I've just described sounds completely far-fetched, doesn't it? It's never going to happen. But what I just described is actually more or less the condition we live in today. Those of us here in California and in the West are emitting greenhouse gas emissions that are affecting people in China, in India, and all over the world. They don't know we decided to drive our car here today and made that decision, but it's going to affect them. And vice versa—they're doing the same thing.

We have globalized environmental problems never before seen on Earth—global issues like climate change, ocean acidification, the breakdown of the biosphere. Each of us now is making decisions that affect everyone else. We're living in a very different era, even from thirty or forty years ago. Because of that, we're going to have to think and act differently.

It starts with first understanding the systems we're part of and the consequences of our actions on those systems. Then we have to decide how we're going to respond. And I think the first response is to adopt a clear moral principle based on what I call moral justice. In Buddhist terms, this is sila—moral conduct—which in Buddhism is the foundation of a peaceful life.

This really means we have to adopt the moral principle, the starting principle, to do no harm. Every religion that I looked at when developing this model begins with the belief that we must do no harm. Even if you can't do good, try not to do harm. That's the first starting point. The commitment is to adopt the universal moral principle to do no harm.

This is about trying to constrain our aggressive and harmful activities. It's not always possible to know all the different aspects of what we do and how it might harm others, but we really need to focus and raise our awareness as much as we can.

So reflect for just a moment: How often do you strive to do no harm? How often are you aware of that moral principle as a driver for your life? Sometimes? Never? Often? We'll come back to this in a second.

But just become aware—do you have a core moral principle of doing no harm?

Now I want you to play along with me again for just a second and go back to that first picture we showed of the blue marble. The acceleration of population has led to an acceleration of economic activity, which has led to an acceleration of energy use around the world, and material use, and basically climate change as a result of massive throughput of energy and materials through our economy. Because energy that's used only breaks down and disperses, that's what created climate change.

And so what many scientists are now saying is that this massive increase of human impacts on the planet, on our blue marble, has actually ushered us into a completely new geological era. For the first time in Earth's history, human activities—rather than natural processes—will determine future life on our planet. Natural processes will certainly interact with our actions, but we are now the primary driver. This new era is called the Anthropocene.

Climate scientists and others are speaking about this transformation. Perhaps you've heard this term before—the Anthropocene? They're telling us we've entered a different era now, permanently, for the first time ever. This means that what we determine, what we do, what we decide, the actions we take, the technologies we adopt, the policies we implement—all of this will determine future life on Earth. What lives and what doesn't, where they live and where they cannot, how the entire web of existence shapes itself.

There is a universal moral axiom: the more power you have over another, the more responsibility you have to use that power benevolently. This means we have now become trustees. This is the fourth natural law of sustainability—the law of trusteeship.

This principle embodies karuna, having compassion and taking care of all living organisms. It encompasses mudita, taking joy in others rather than being concerned only with ourselves. And it requires non-attachment. Trusteeship recognizes that each of us is on Earth for only a very short period of time. No one in this room will be here one hundred years from now. This means we are only temporarily managing or responsible for the resources we have stewardship over. We are temporary trustees.

We now bear the responsibility that what we decide as trustees will determine what life on Earth exists fifty, one hundred, one hundred fifty years from now, and where it will exist. We have the responsibility to manage this sacred trust with extraordinary care.

The fourth commitment, therefore, is to adopt your trustee obligations and do good for all life. The first principle of moral justice focuses on trying to do no harm. But now, because climate change has become so serious and other impacts so profound, we also must actively do good.

Different tools and strategies are developing for each of these principles. Most organizations I work with—businesses and governments—are focused on reducing their environmental impacts, which means doing less harm. But we also need to transform our approach entirely and actively do good.

There are emerging fields you might know of, such as biomimicry, where we create new products and services that mimic nature's wisdom. There's green chemistry, which uses natural processes rather than synthetic chemicals. We actually must restore the Earth—we cannot simply reduce the harm we're doing to it. This is the crucial difference between the two approaches.

The final principle I want to share is the principle of free will—the natural law of free will. The Buddha taught often that as we increase our awareness, we become aware that we are free at any moment to make different choices. But this requires greater awareness and deeper understanding.

The dharma principle connected with free will is paññā—the wisdom that leads us out of suffering. This wisdom manifests as increased awareness and increased mindfulness of all our actions, of the systems we participate in, of how we impact those systems. It involves adopting an ethical way of life and understanding that we are trustees.

This is the final principle: choose your own destiny. We do not have to continue down the path we have traveled these last fifty to one hundred years. Throughout history, societies have made fundamentally different changes driven by new ways of thinking and seeing the world—many, many times. We don't always realize this transformation is possible, but it has happened repeatedly. And each time societies have made such fundamental shifts, most people have ended up much better off.

I believe that as we expand our consciousness—and perhaps this framework can help you and others do just that—we will all find ourselves much better off.

If we have two more minutes, I'd like each of you to reflect briefly on how often you find yourself following these commitments, essentially following these dharma principles. Then turn to a partner and share for a moment what you discovered.

Evaluate yourself honestly—how well are you doing? How much awareness are you cultivating? Try to stay focused on the dharma principles. For just a very short time, share this reflection with a partner and explore it together. We'll take two minutes for this conversation.

Does anyone want to share something that emerged from this conversation? Anything that became particularly clear or meaningful? I apologize for the brief duration—I encourage you to continue this dialogue afterward for as long as you can. What would anyone like to share?

Absolutely. The point you raise is crucial—it's challenging to make right choices or skillful choices today because of the structure of the systems we're embedded within. I think we all feel this tension deeply.

But this practice is not about achieving perfection. This is about continuously expanding our awareness. As more people expand their awareness, we will generate the collective wisdom and political will necessary to transform those very systems that currently constrain our choices.

So it's really about increased mindfulness and then encouraging others to take the same steps forward.

I think the comment from the back was that we often get stuck thinking only about cause and effect, without considering the systems we're part of and the moral principles we need to adopt. Moral justice needs to guide our thinking and behavior, along with trusteeship. You're absolutely right. That's why I use this framework now with public and private organizations and nonprofits of all kinds, and I find very positive results.

We're actually using it in work I've been coordinating with the administration to encourage a national conversation about climate change. I'm optimistic that something significant is going to happen. They've gotten overwhelmed with the gun debate, healthcare, immigration, and other issues, so finding political space for them to act has been one of our challenges. The structure of the system in which the White House works is also very difficult to navigate, and there are other issues within the administration itself. But I'm optimistic that we will see this administration take more positive steps than any other, by helping them expand their awareness beyond narrow issues.

The point about not getting caught up in self-judgment is absolutely right. The more aware you become of the consequences of your actions, the more you can feel humbled and think, "Oh my gosh, I'm doing all these wrong things." But you have to first realize the systems you're part of—you live in this society. Then constantly grow your awareness and realize that you have a choice.

The more choices you make, the better off you're going to be. Sometimes you make a choice thinking it's not the best one you could have made, that it might have serious impact, but it's the only thing you can do. As long as you're aware of it, next time you can make a different choice. And as other people begin to think the same way, we can create the social change necessary to transform the structures of those systems.

So don't feel bad. This is just the structure of the systems we're working in. But keep growing your awareness.

I want to thank Bob for coming and sharing all the work that he's doing—truly making a difference. And remember to write those letters to teachers to help encourage and motivate them to make a difference.

I'll leave you with this quote from John Seed, who Joanna teaches with—a very inspiring environmental deep ecology being. He says: "Well, you might think there's nothing on the horizon that can help us. And you might wonder what kind of miracle would be needed to make a difference? Well, it would be a very simple one, really. All that it would need would be for human beings to wake up one day different than they were the day before and realize that this is the end unless we make these changes, and then deciding to make the change.

"That doesn't seem like a very likely thing to happen. But on the other hand, the whole road that we've traveled is so littered with miracles that it's only our strange kind of modern psyche that refuses to see it. I mean, the miracle of being descended from a fish that chose to leave the water and walk on the land. Well,

anyone with a pedigree like that—you can't lose hope."

Thank you very much.

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