Dharma Practice and the Climate Crisis

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:01:34

Last week I talked about being on retreat for four weeks and the beauty and the glories of going deeper into silence, exploring the nature of mind and heart and body, and some of my reflections and intentions coming out of that. This morning I want to talk about a theme that in a way seems to belong to another world from being on retreat. I'm inspired by Earth Day, and I want to talk about the relation of our dharma practice to responding to climate change and climate disruption. But I want to do this quite personally and in a way that I hope is not didactic or preachy, either to myself or to anyone else.

I'm doing this partly because I'm inspired for the Saturday event that I'm joining in with others. But I want to frame it initially as something like a dilemma, which I think many of us probably feel. I want to do this rather personally with myself.

On one hand, the practice of meditation is so compelling. For me, being on retreat for those four weeks—and I've probably collectively in my life been on retreat seven or eight years, maybe more, so I clearly value it, which is an understatement—there's something very precious about the experience of sustained meditation. Of course, we all experience this when we practice regularly in a way that's not as intensive, but still to practice for half an hour, to come to Spirit Rock, to be with the land.

The time on retreat, I talked about the beauty of living simply, of not having input, of being away from emails, of being just with the natural beauty. I talked about the qualities of renewal, of deeper insights. From a certain perspective, you could make the case that what else is there really to do in this life other than to develop wisdom and love and really to focus on it? Really to do that and to touch more deeply.

I talked about how I was deeply motivated to have my own daily life express a little more fully those qualities of simplicity and awareness and beauty and slowing down. Daily life for many of us, but maybe not for all of us, is fast moving, and it's often hard to remember our priorities.

When I came back—I've been back about two weeks—I noticed that I've really implemented a number of small ways to have more awareness in daily life. Some of it's just doing small practices. I stop. I'm not so busy. One of the secrets is that a lot of meditation teachers get very busy. True confession. We get busy. Scheduling retreats is really, really hard, knowing what to do. Sometimes we just think, "Oh my God, did I really schedule that? Three things in a row? Oh my God." My friend and colleague Gil Fronsdale once said, "Too much dharma is not dharma." Very interesting. So we get busy too. We do more retreats, and we have a perk that when we're teaching we get to meditate a lot, which is very nice in that way.

But I found that in really giving more attention to awareness in daily life, you know what I did less of? I

didn't read the newspaper as much. I didn't listen to the radio, actually, almost at all in the last two weeks. I mean, I looked a little bit, I knew more or less the headlines, but I didn't do so much. I usually, in the past, most days, listened quite a bit to Democracy Now. Some of you listen to that program? Very wonderful. A little more focused on the problems than the solutions, but that's okay. I found myself not doing that so much. I wasn't intending not to do it in the future, but it just was to have that space to bring in these changes. It took something like that.

So, very compelling. Dharma could seem like this is what I want to do. Forget about the world, right? Or just be a little bit in the world. It's a very compelling vision. I feel deeply drawn to have more awareness in daily life and to develop more wisdom and love.

And then...

There's the question of responding to climate change. It could be other issues—violence, racism, whatever it might be. But in a way, we could say that responding to climate change may be the defining issue of the current generation. We could really say that.

I've personally also been deeply drawn to understand and help be part of the response to that issue. In the past, I've done several workshops on that theme with colleagues. One colleague, Sarah Shedler, worked with Friends of the Earth on climate issues, and we did a day-long workshop together. It's been a consistent theme.

I've been attending the meetings of the Berkeley Climate Action Coalition, which is quite inspiring. It's really open to anyone. The United Nations said that the Berkeley Climate Plan may be a model for all of North America. There is a very clear plan which is being acted on to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 33% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. So beautiful plan.

And we could see that this is so compelling. This is the future of the earth. There's a very clear scientific consensus—we might say 97% of climate scientists agree—that we have major problems, that there have been significant shifts already.

There was an article that maybe some of you read by Bill McKibben a few months ago. I think it was in August in Rolling Stone. It's become a famous article. He was clearer than usual, saying that in June in the United States, there were 3,215 records for cities for highest temperature in a month. You could go on like that, assemble the facts, but it's very clear that things are actually happening more quickly than scientists thought. It's dire, and it's more dire in some places than others. It's actually most dire, as we know, in countries that have not caused the problem.

There's this pressing need to radically shift behavior. Some scientists say we need to cut greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 80% by 2020. That's quite hard to imagine happening. But yet on the bright side, the solutions are actually very, very clear. It doesn't take much thinking to know what to do.

There are some excellent books out there. Some of you may know Lester Brown's work. He has a very clear model for how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2020. He says it would cost 200 billion a year, which is way less than the defense budgets of so many countries. So it's very possible, and he has a clear analysis of increasing energy efficiency and conservation in a number of ways.

A key to it is taxing carbon emissions—most people say that—and shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy. There are all sorts of actions that come under these categories: stabilizing the population, eradicating poverty. Poverty, as social scientists tell us, is one of the major reasons for population increase and thus greater resource use. Restoring the earth and feeding people in a different way.

So it's completely doable. How to resolve the problem is completely doable. Intelligent people have thought about it, know what to do, and yet governments aren't acting—or they're acting minimally, or they're acting more in some countries than in others. Our country is not acting much. Some cities are acting, like Berkeley and others.

We have this challenging situation where it's really the fate of the earth. If the warming continues unabated, it will be horrifying for future generations in a number of ways. If it isn't changed, there will be resource wars, there will be probably millions and maybe even billions of refugees.

We know... I think those scenarios—we probably live with them in an unconscious way inside, so we know that.

Bill McKibben says if 10% of us are deeply passionate about this and change our lifestyles and have fuel-efficient cars and act impeccably with recycling, not much will change. But if 10 or 15% of us are active, along with the good lifestyle, and actually act to shift the systems, he says everything will change.

So it's kind of a call. Do you want to be part of the 10 or 15% who help shift the world to a sustainable course?

So again, very compelling. Incredibly compelling. What—who wants to meditate all the time when the world's at stake, right?

So do you see the dilemma? If you just came in, I presented the dilemma. On the one hand, the spiritual life and just seeking personal peace and just getting one's life somewhat together. It's such an important pursuit, right? We heard there are challenges. We have personal challenges. Our family members have challenges just to be helpful, to have more love, more wisdom. Sometimes they say that's a full-time pursuit, right?

And then, on the other hand, the world's in great need.

So what do we do? How do you work with that dilemma? Do you choose one way or do you choose the other way?

And so the answer is what? The answer is do both. Do both and connect them. And I'll say more about that because I don't at all mean that everyone needs to be an activist. And I'll get to that. So I just wanted to say that initially.

But how to respond to that kind of dilemma of the power of inner transformation and bringing that out into one's life on the one hand, and then the really dire need for caring people to be part of a deep response right now. How do you work with that? And I think, I mean, I'm sure each of us at times grapples with that. It's really very, very urgent.

And I thought of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese teacher who was in Vietnam as a monk, being in the monasteries with the traditional training at the time of deep social need—war and civil war in Vietnam. And this is what he said. This is the, as it were, the both-and response.

He said, "When I was in Vietnam, so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism. Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. We must be aware of the real problems of the world. Then with mindfulness, we will know what to do and what not to do to be of help."

And we can see that in the lives of other deep contemplatives, that they came to something like that approach. And they did it in their own ways. Some of you know the life of Thomas Merton, who was a lifelong contemplative in a monastery in Kentucky at the Abbey of Gethsemane. And he had been an activist before he became a monk. Some of you know—you've read The Seven Storey Mountain. And he kept that consciousness even when he was in the monastery, even when he was a hermit. And some of you may know that a lot of the Catholic activists used to visit him. The Berrigans, people used to write to him. And he, in some ways, even though he stayed in the monastery, he stayed connected. So he did it in his own way. It wasn't like he had to do it in someone else's way.

He brought this consciousness into his writing, exploring moral responsibility and larger social issues as a monk living his final years as a hermit in the forest. Buddhadasa, the great Thai teacher, followed a very similar path in Thailand. People would come to visit him, and he wrote extensively about connecting the Dhamma to social concerns. He was someone who maintained a lifelong meditation practice even in situations of urgency, and he found his own ways to honor both contemplative depth and engaged response.

I think of Dorothy Day, whose story follows a remarkably similar pattern. A person called to religious faith who found ways to combine spiritual practice with social action. Or Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma. There are these luminous figures—perhaps someone like Gandhi as well—who discovered ways to do both. I think much of this comes down to recognizing where one's gifts lie and finding authentic ways to help.

I think often of Joanna Macy's work—she'll be one of the teachers present on Saturday. She teaches about what she calls "the great turning," essentially the transition to a sustainable world. It's a beautiful vision, a compelling picture of what that transformation might look like.

She describes three main ways that the great turning occurs, and I invite you to listen for where you feel drawn. Some people, she says, must engage in what she calls "holding actions" to prevent further damage. This is traditionally the province of activism—stopping additional harm from occurring. Some people are called to this essential work.

Others are called to help shift basic institutions toward greater sustainability, toward ways of operating that embody more dharma. These are people working in the helping professions who bring different perspectives to their work, those shifting children's education to include more teaching about sustainability, those transforming the medical profession, creating farmers' markets, developing community agriculture. All of these institutional shifts represent profoundly significant work.

So where are we called? The third pathway involves shifting consciousness itself. This transformation happens through developing different approaches to parenting, to education. It might mean teaching yoga while exploring the parallels between earth and body. It could involve teaching meditation to cultivate greater sensitivity not only to ourselves but to the earth. All of these practices form part of this essential work, because what truly needs to shift is an entire way of being—a complete transformation in how we exist on this earth.

What I want to explore further is how dharma practice necessarily engages with this transformation, and how those seeking to create change need dharma practice. Without this integration, there tend to be significant distortions. This is what I want to examine for the remainder of our time together.

We want to discover our own gifts. I often share that beautiful quotation from Howard Thurman, which feels particularly relevant here: "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, because what the world needs is those who have come alive."

Where are my gifts? Where am I called in ways that connect with this vast need for transformation and that also connect with dharma practice? Sometimes we must listen deeply to discern what that calling might be.

I want to acknowledge, from personal experience, that there are natural cycles to this work. Sometimes we're drawn more inward, sometimes more outward.

There are cycles where I've chosen not to engage with social issues for two or three years, focusing primarily on the inner work. At other times, I've felt called to bring this practice outward into the world more actively. We also experience developmental cycles where we're genuinely called to focus on our own personal healing, to cultivate a little more peace, or to work through something specific—and these periods need to be honored.

This is really about respecting where we are in our own journeys while asking ourselves: Am I called to help in some way? I'm posing this question for myself as well, because I'm definitely more engaged with the meditative aspects these days than the response side, even though teaching can be part of that outward expression. So I'm genuinely asking myself these same questions. These are inquiries for all of us.

For the remainder of our time together, I want to make two key points. First, that dharma practice needs engagement to be mature and complete. Second, that these two aspects—inner development and outer engagement—desperately need each other. People who want to help shift the world need spiritual practice, for without it their efforts tend to become distorted. Similarly, our spiritual practice, without some sense of how we engage with larger issues, may also become distorted.

I also want to return to some core principles, because I believe responses develop beautifully from our foundational practices of kindness, generosity, compassion, interdependence, wisdom, and so forth.

But there's a real danger that our meditation practice will become limited and privileged. When I was in Thailand and attended meetings of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, many of the Thai leaders in that movement expressed concern about the future of Buddhist practice in the United States and the West generally. They feared it would become a form of middle-class escape from the world's problems—a luxury practice for those seeking a little more peace in a difficult world, available only to the already privileged.

Cultural critic Slavoj Žižek from former Yugoslavia has made some provocative observations along these lines. He's become something of an iconoclastic philosopher whose talks resemble rock concerts, complete with Yugoslav accent. He makes strong statements, including this one about Western Buddhism: he fears it's becoming "the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism" because "its meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity."

According to Žižek, "Western Buddhism enables you to fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it, that you are well aware of how worthless this spectacle is, and that what really matters to you is the peace of the inner self to which you know you can always withdraw."

I don't necessarily agree with this assessment, but it's a pointed critique that raises important questions about how we use our practice and how we relate to the world's needs.

I think a more constructive approach is recognizing that the core principles of our practice naturally call us, as we deepen, to respond to others and help them. This is what we've explored extensively as the path of the bodhisattva—one who works for personal well-being while also helping others come to greater freedom.

There's a beautiful passage from poet Gary Snyder, who lives near Nevada City in California, that captures

this integration: "Historically, Buddhist philosophers have failed to analyze out the degree to which ignorance and suffering are caused or encouraged by social factors, considering fear and desire to be givens of the human condition. Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under."

He continues: "The mercy of the West has been social revolution. The mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self void. We need both. They are both contained in the traditional three aspects of the Dharma path: wisdom, meditation, and ethics or morality."

Snyder defines these beautifully: "Wisdom is intuitive knowledge of the mind of love and clarity that lies beneath one's own ego-driven anxieties and aggressions. Meditation is going into this mind to see this for yourself over and over again until it becomes the mind you live in—until love and wisdom become the mind you live in. Ethics or morality is bringing it back out in the way you live through personal example and responsible action, ultimately towards the true community or sangha of all beings."

He wrote this in 1961—quite a prescient statement about the both-and approach we need.

Reflecting on how our core principles call us to respond, I see that this integration could easily become a much longer exploration...

For example, I was talking this morning over breakfast with Steve Armstrong, who's teaching the retreat up above, and we were talking about generosity. Generosity is dana, the first of the paramis, the first of the virtues we develop traditionally. This is really about giving—ultimately, it's about giving one's life. But it's also about asking, how much is enough? What can I offer?

I think this connects with the ethical precept of not taking that which is not given. Are we taking what actually belongs to future generations? Are we acting in a way that impacts them? If we want to be generous to future generations and give them the same kinds of opportunities we have, we would want to make sure that their lives have the right conditions to prosper. That comes out of a sense of generosity. It can come out of a sense of interdependence—that we are connected, that we are responsible.

The core ethical idea is that my actions matter, that there is karma, that my actions have impact. When we are collectively using resources in a way that has negative impact on future generations, we want to know that. If we want to live ethically, we want to know that. We want to be caring. We want to live according to the precepts of not taking that which is not given. We want to be generous—not just to future generations, but to people in other countries.

We know that people in the U.S. consume 25% of the resources of the world, and we have about 5% of the population. I also saw that each U.S. citizen, on average, is responsible for 55,000 pounds of carbon emissions a year through our ordinary activities. In Germany, it's 27,000, and in Sweden it's 15,000—because they do things differently and probably have a more abundant lifestyle than we do in terms of the average level.

If we are collectively acting in ways that impact the future, isn't that something to consider in terms of our core principles of compassion, of generosity, of interdependence, of being aware of things, of wanting to respond to the suffering of others? If our actions collectively in the West have caused climate issues, which are more acutely felt probably in Asia and Africa right now than in the U.S.—although more recently in the U.S.—isn't there an imperative for us collectively to respond, to change?

Part of our dharma practice is having a sense of the causes and conditions. How does this arise? What's the relationship between my actions and other things happening? We want to know that. We want to be more attuned to it. We want to act—again, the core principle of our ethics is non-harming. We do not want our lives to harm others. It's an aspiration. And so any of these principles, if we go into them more deeply, are a basis for wanting to have some energy to collectively shift.

There are many ways that we can personally shift. On Saturday, I'm going to particularly reflect on how Spirit Rock might become more aligned with this. I think the primary hard issue is transportation. So would the Wednesday morning group be willing to do more carpooling? Some of it comes down to this. Would you be willing to do more carpooling to help reduce the carbon footprint of Spirit Rock? Because ultimately something like that's collectively going to be necessary.

At certain times in our history, there was collective mobilization towards a great cause. World War II was like that after Pearl Harbor. An entire country totally mobilized. People shifted their lives. They did things. People grew victory gardens. Women went to work. Industries shifted to help the larger cause, and something like that may be necessary now. How to be part of that, how to do that—these are the questions we face.

So I think that all of our core Dharma principles, and also very significantly the meditative training that helps us to be aware of what's there in our minds and when there's reactivity, and when there is also to see more deeply into our conditioning—some of the conditioning may be, if there are aspects of privilege, more subtle, or to see how much am I attached to certain levels of comfort. I saw that a lot when I traveled in Asia, and particularly the former Soviet Union, which is actually way harder than Asia. I've talked about that—the lack of Western toilet paper. Big issue! But again, I don't think it's about deprivation, but it's just about what are we called to do? What are we called to do?

And the other side of that is, I think, that the current models of how change comes about, particularly traditional models, current models of activism, are woefully inadequate. I don't think they're going to work. The model of confrontational activism, of blaming and judging, demonizing the enemy—it tends to alienate quite a large part of the population. So I think a whole new model of how change occurs has to come into being.

What are some of the problems with this traditional model of activism, which, of course, has its merits? I'm not demonizing it or wanting to dump on it. But let me name a few ways. These are probably very familiar.

It can be incredibly self-righteous, as if everyone's not part of the problem. There can be attachment to views, possibly. It goes along with the self-righteousness—attachment to views. There can be lack of skill with difficult emotions, being caught up in anger, for example, not working skillfully with anger. Having anger fuel a movement has its limits. It can be demonization of the enemy, lack of creating what Dr. King called the beloved community. There can be, because people aren't also taking care of themselves, burnout. People often don't take care of themselves and even think that taking care of oneself is wrong. Perhaps you've met people like that.

I remember when I was in college and I was an activist and I had friends who thought it was a waste of time to go to a movie. Things get a little extreme in college sometimes, but who felt guilty doing that. And I've talked with present-day people who work—sometimes there's a certain culture of that in some circles. Burnout happens. Often people get burned out by being with difficulty or not having the success they want, and they start blaming.

When I went in 2005 to a conference on spiritual activism, I asked people what they mostly needed to learn, and they said, "We need to work with anger. We so often turn on each other." Infighting among activist groups is a huge issue, big problem.

So think about this: attachment to views, lack of skill with difficult emotions, demonization of others, blaming, judging, lack of taking care of oneself, difficulty of being with difficult situations. Where are they going to learn these things, how to do them better? In the home initially, but basically in exactly what we're doing here. Isn't that interesting? I just named those—that's the list of topics we talked about. Working skillfully with difficult emotions, not being attached to views, being mindful of our own reactivity, looking into our conditioning, taking care of oneself, having compassion for self as well as others.

So that's very significant for me. I think that there has to be this marriage, or it's not going to work. And it really is actually sowing the seeds of a culture where we connect inner and outer together. For me, there's a very inspiring vision of these coming together which I want to be part of and I want to help come into being.

So let me just finish by summarizing a little bit. I think that there's a danger that spiritual practice, when it's not connected in some ways to the urgent needs of the world, can become distorted. Again, allowing for the cycles of being—times when we really need to focus primarily in an inner way. And that can be several years. That's been that way for me. So it can be distorted.

There's also the danger that we don't recognize the world is actually within us—that we take in the world and carry it inside ourselves.

For those who feel called to work directly in the world, there's a profound need to develop spiritual resources. Without the inner foundations of compassion, equanimity, balance, and the ability to see and

work skillfully with our reactive mind, the overwhelming nature of global challenges becomes unbearable. People simply won't be able to sustain their efforts without these spiritual underpinnings.

This points to a very natural and beautiful connection between inner work and outer engagement. This is a large vision—one that might guide us for the next fifty, seventy, or one hundred years.

Personally, I believe it comes down to looking deeply within and asking: Where am I called? You wouldn't be here tonight unless you were called to deepen in love, wisdom, and compassion. Many of us are already acting in the world in various ways, but the question remains: How do we work with this calling authentically? Where do we fit within Joanna Macy's three dimensions of engaged response?

This means we must find our own way, our own voice. Our engagement might be directly on the front lines, or perhaps in quieter ways—cultivating community gardens, supporting educational systems for children, or countless other forms of service. The key is discerning where we're genuinely called: helping to prevent further damage, working to shift institutions, or focusing on changing consciousness in ourselves and others.

I want to end with a short poem by Deena Metzger that I love, though I'll have to recite it from memory:

The world is on fire.
We are in danger.
There is no time not to love.
There is no time to rush.

I may not have it exactly right, but the essence captures something essential: there is genuine urgency, and yet it's possible to stay rooted in the present moment, to avoid rushing frantically or having our heads on fire. We can remain centered in love, awareness, and wisdom even as we engage with the world's pain. This is her way of holding both the urgency and the peace.

Let me invite us to sit quietly for a few moments before we continue.

Thank you for your generous attention. I know that sometimes when we come to dharma talks, we're seeking peaceful reflection, and suddenly—oh my goodness—here comes the world again! I'm aware of this tension, and it really does embody the dilemma I've been exploring tonight. So thank you for your patience and willingness to engage with these questions.

Any reflections or thoughts you'd like to share?

"I was wondering what organizations you'd recommend for people wanting to get involved?"

The beautiful thing about climate action is that we can respond meaningfully at every level. We can make significant impact right in our own households, and then expand to city-wide initiatives. Berkeley, for example, has developed a remarkable Climate Action Plan that's both comprehensive and precise. They've

clearly analyzed where greenhouse gas emissions originate—transportation, housing, and waste being the three primary areas—and created specific pathways for reduction.

There's tremendous potential for household-level action. I brought along this wonderful book called *Low Carbon Diet*—it's a thirty-day program designed to help you "lose 5,000 pounds." That's 5,000 pounds of carbon emissions, which is significant when you consider that the average American household produces 55,000 pounds annually. The book offers simple, practical steps that anyone can follow.

Organizations like the Ecology Center here in Berkeley provide excellent support for this kind of household-level engagement, offering resources and community for people wanting to reduce their environmental impact in concrete, manageable ways.

Then there's the community level, city level. You can be part of a city that adopts a plan very much like Berkeley's. It's a beautiful plan that's out there on the web, and many Bay Area communities are already implementing similar initiatives. Marin has adopted this approach, and Spirit Rock has embraced green energy. We know that all of the electricity and resources we use here come from the Marine Energy Authority. While there are some challenges with it, it's essentially a sustainable model of energy use.

Cities can accomplish meaningful change, and at the national and international levels, the work becomes more complex. I like to think that ultimately, the personal and community or citywide levels become the foundation for these larger transformations. They go hand in hand - it's not an either-or proposition.

I have a handout I'd be happy to share with you, which I prepared for a workshop some time ago. It lists numerous organizations doing excellent work. I particularly appreciate Bill McKibben's work with 350.org. Lester Brown, connected with the World Watch Institute in Washington, D.C., has written books that lay out complete solutions. It's not hard to imagine, and it's all doable. The challenging part is getting there.

This is the truly promising aspect of our situation. The solutions are achievable - it's more a matter of political will and being willing to act in ways that challenge the power of energy companies. There's a political dimension here, as energy companies are closely aligned with politicians. This creates a challenging dynamic.

Organizations like 350.org, Greenpeace, and Al Gore's climate leader training program are doing exceptional work. Gore's training happens once or twice yearly and is making a real impact. This Saturday, nine organizations will be present, offering comprehensive resources.

From Buddhist perspectives, there's wonderful work being done. A few years ago, my friend David Loy co-edited "Buddhist Responses to the Climate Emergency," which I believe is available in the bookstore. It provides an excellent summary and includes many meaningful statements. There's also a valuable resource called the Forum on Religion and Ecology, which shares relevant information and focuses on the intersection between spirituality and ecological responses, particularly climate change.

In the Bay Area, there's an organization called Green Sangha that undertakes various projects, including offering household audits.

Someone asked about handling conflicting data and views within the movement. For example, one school of thought advocates that a vegan diet will save the most carbon, while the Organic Consumers Association suggests that pasturing animals as our ancestors did is actually more effective. How do we work with these differences among people moving in the same direction?

First, we want to apply our practice of working skillfully with views - to not be attached to our positions. So all those people should come on Wednesday morning! But seriously, there are numerous intersections here, and I've facilitated several retreats specifically for activists.

And we should do more of that maybe here. Because a certain number of people really love that. It's a relief to really not be so caught in views and anger and so forth. So that's the first point.

But I think that my sense of it, without knowing a lot of it in detail, is that the area of disagreement in the big picture is relatively minor. On those issues.

Well, it's just an example. I just wondered if there were an established process or practice, or people who really made it their work to sort out conflicting approaches or enable people to hold the possibility of different truths.

I think that's important, because the big causes of greenhouse gases are other than the ones you've mentioned. And I hope that there can be—I think people have to be trained in not being attached to views. And then of course, people can do research on those issues to help clarify. But I think there are different views on that particular issue, as there would be on quite a few. But I think the larger agreements are the important ones. That would be my perspective on that.

I belong to the Marine Green Sangha, and I really enjoy it. And then we also have some very interesting guest speakers that come every week and speak. So if you're looking for something like that, it's on Sunday morning from 10 to 1, the second Sunday of the month.

Yes, I think feeling connected on these issues is important. You know, it could be in one's block or neighborhood or something. I mean, there's a lot of creativity demanded, and leadership as well. Because it's—I don't know about you, but many of us are very busy, right? And it's like, "Oh my God, climate change as well as my..." It's a little bit like the mentality—remember that t-shirt that had a cartoon of a woman saying, during the anti-nuclear war movement, "There goes my career."

I think we have to be very humble about our inner contradictions.

Can you say just a few words about how to not be discouraged? That's a great question.

Well, for one thing, I think generally it's like a lot of our practice. The core structure of practice in general

is being willing to look at difficult stuff and then also spending a certain amount of time in beautiful states. If we only worked with our own suffering, we get burned out—in meditation as well as in other areas.

When I work with people on transforming the judgmental mind, which is hard stuff personally, it's very clear that there's a balance between going into the judgmental mind, which tends to be painful and difficult. When you go deeper, you get into hard stuff—sometimes old patterns that come out of difficult childhood material and so forth. It's important to do that, but it's also important to really touch base with loving kindness, with beautiful states, to feel one's own beauty—especially if self-judgment's the issue—to really be away from the judgmental mind and touch the beauty and touch the wonderful qualities.

And I think this is interesting in terms of how change occurs. Does change occur more by defeating the bad stuff or the hard stuff, or does it happen more by touching the good stuff and connecting with that more and more? A lot of times, I think historically, when you look at it, it's more the latter. I think personally it's often more the latter.

Once, Heather Sundberg and I were talking at a seven-day retreat on transforming the judgmental mind, and we asked, "Have you transformed your judgmental mind more by actually going into it, hanging out with it, doing the hard work, or just actually shifting more to more beautiful states of confidence and beauty and wisdom and love?" And we had to say, well, maybe the latter actually. The first—you have to be willing to do that. It's important. You can't run from that.

And so I think, for me, that suggests a model. And that's part of what's missing in traditional activism. It's almost entirely focused on, "Here are the problems." Here are the problems. And it's natural, if you just focus on the problems and haven't found so many recent successes, it's very easy to get discouraged.

So I think focusing on the positive is essential. This is what Gandhi understood deeply. Yes, there was the campaign to oust the British, but something that's not often well known is that he had what he called the constructive program, which was about truly transforming India in a particular way. This is where the focus was on village agriculture, economics—this is where he had the weaving and spinning wheels. That was very much a central focus.

Generally speaking, I would focus on the positive and be careful about dwelling too much on the negative. Watch your mind. Watch your mind telling negative stories. Watch other people telling negative stories that impact you.

Ultimately, my own confidence comes from my faith in the human spirit and from what I know directly, personally, experientially—which is that love and wisdom are deeper than suffering. That's the root faith that would keep me going through almost anything, because I know that. That's a fruit of practice: to know that more and more, to know that no matter what anyone tells you, no matter what your experience is, no matter what difficulties arise, this is deeper. This is deeper. And of course, as one rests in that more and

more, it becomes increasingly unshakable. We call that equanimity.

So personally, explore your own depths more and more until you know your own depths in a way that gives you a clear sense of what are the roots of suffering and confusion—which are part of the crisis, part of the roots of this global crisis. What are the roots of that in our own minds? How do we understand that? And is there something deeper than that? I think we get a clear answer that there is something deeper. And so we have to know that. We have to study all of this.

How does suffering occur? We have to understand. We have to look out at the world and have dharma eyes. That's why I say look out at the world and see it through the eyes of your own practice. That becomes like a protection—a protection against discouragement. And then you have to work with it, work with people like Joanna Macy and all these beautiful practices to work with that issue in particular.

So again, thank you for your patience. I realize this is challenging material at times, sometimes troubling and upsetting. But I think we have a commitment with practice to look at reality, as skillfully as we can, and to respond.

So thank you again. And may our time together be of benefit to others.

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