Mindfulness and Climate Action: 1

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:13:53

Greetings everyone. My name is Tanisra, and I welcome you to our conversation on Mindfulness, the Dharma, and Climate Action. I'll be hosting this conversation today and through the coming months on behalf of One Earth Sangha, Buddhist Teachers for Climate Action, and our sponsor, Maestro Conference. Again, a really warm welcome to each and every one of you who have called in today to join this important conversation we're having together.

Before we begin, I'd like to suggest—as it's taken quite a lot of work to get to this point for the team in the background, and also for each of you as you enter into the reality of what we're engaging, the tremendous challenge we're facing now to ensure a sustainable future for the generations that come after us—that we begin by just taking a deep breath and really feeling, as we take that breath, the breath in your body.

Feel your body. Feel the connection to the earth beneath you, with your feet on the ground and the pressure of sitting on your seat. Just connect with that sensation. Take a deep breath and arrive here. Let's arrive here into our body, into this space, into our presence, and into this conversation together. Then breathe out, trusting the flow and the process that we're going to be engaging.

Today marks the start of Earth Care Week, and this is a really great way to begin. We have fifteen hundred people and more signed up for this conversation. There's a huge response from the Dharma and mindfulness community, and we really appreciate that.

Just before we begin, I'm interested to know how many of you have been involved in the People's Climate March, which just happened in New York and across the globe in recent weeks, and all the events that were engaged with that. If you were involved in that or aware of that, just press one on your dial pad so we can get a sense. That's great. That's fantastic. Thank you so much.

This was a huge event, and I think what happened during that time is we became aware of ourselves as a global tribe—a huge collective of people gathered across all diversities, representing all kinds of concerns. I think this really marks a turning point in the climate movement. Our conversations that we'll be having together are to place our particular unique contribution as Dharma practitioners.

To continue, I'd like to first briefly introduce our team that's doing the backup for our talks. They will be speaking and helping out later in the call. Lou Leonard is involved and co-founder of One Earth Sangha. Kristin Barker is also co-founder of One Earth Sangha, both resident in Washington, D.C. And Yong Oh, resident in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has also been very involved in helping us with the IT.

Today, the theme of our discussion—we're very grateful and appreciative to have three fantastic,

accomplished, and experienced Dharma teachers to help guide our conversation—is: What is the authentic attitude or understanding that moves us towards real and authentic transformation in our times? The presenters will reflect together on the qualities of heart and mind that enable us to face the suffering of the earth and how we can begin to respond wisely to this.

Our teachers leading our conversation this morning will begin with Tara Brach, then Ruth King and Jack Kornfield. Many of you, if not all of you, will be very familiar with them. You can also check the more detailed biographies on the One Earth Sangha website.

I'm going to hand over to Lou Leonard from One Earth Sangha now to introduce himself. He's been supporting us with the science and will be engaging the conversation in that way. Lou, please introduce yourself and then take us into the conversation with Tara, who will be leading us into this focus.

Thank you, Tanisra. Hello, everyone. On behalf of Kristin Barker, the amazing co-founder of One Earth Sangha, whom I work with on this project, welcome to this first climate conversation.

One Earth Sangha is an online community of thousands of mindfulness practitioners and also a network of sanghas staying connected and learning from each other about the Dharma and climate change. We're so excited to kick off the series today and really so grateful to all of you for sharing part of your Sundays with us over the next five weeks.

You all received a background paper last week created by Cuti Kanko, a senior scientist from Environmental Defense Fund, and me. If you didn't get the paper, let us know and we'll send it to you. Don't think of this as an authoritative treatise—we couldn't do that in ten pages, and that's not necessary for this class—but it's just intended as a common starting point for all of us.

I'm not going to run through the ten pages of the paper. Because the science can be a barrier for some, I thought I'd offer my favorite ten words that summarize where we are now on climate: Things are getting worse and worse and better and better, faster and faster. Almost seems like a climate koan.

For example, on the one hand, the Arctic is collapsing before our eyes, and it's doing so at breathtaking speed. There's growing evidence that this warming of the Arctic is also causing larger impacts to our planet. It's causing the jet stream to wobble, which is helping to create things like the polar vortex, the California drought, and the path of storms like Sandy.

On the other hand, for the first six months of this year—the first six months of 2014—70% of new U.S. electric generation capacity came from wind and solar. Seventy percent. And just two weeks ago, China announced that it's developing a plan to cap its carbon pollution.

So if you read nothing else in the background paper, look at the graph on the bottom of page four. It shows that the key fork in the road for us on this challenge is still ahead, not behind. We don't know how this movie is going to turn out, and what we do matters.

In my day job, I lead the climate change program at World Wildlife Fund, and on many days, the enormousness of this challenge makes me feel small and inadequate. Most difficultly, it makes me feel alone a lot. But the best cure that I've found for managing these feelings is what we're doing today, and that's Sangha. So thank you so much for being here and helping to create this Sangha over the next five weeks.

We are going to have a Q&A period later in this call where you can virtually raise your hand, and you can also submit questions during the course of this conversation to questions@OneEarthSangha.org. Also, just want to let you know that this class is going to be recorded and available afterwards.

So without further ado, I'd like to welcome the first of our teachers, Tara Brach. Tara needs no introduction, or at least not one that I'm qualified to give. She's simply one of the wisest hearts of our time, and I'm grateful to say that she's also the leader of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, where I practice here in Washington, D.C. Tara, we're so grateful to have you.

Thank you so much, Lou, and thank you for your powerful words. I'm just sitting here resonating with what you said about feeling alone and about Sangha, because everything that is better and better is coming out of some feeling of us all together—our connection, our consciousness.

So I'm sensing in that spirit for us to pause again and reflect. I gather in the last hour, instead of 1,500, we're more like 1,700 and counting. And just to—as you feel yourself right here—just feel your body, your aliveness, whatever state of heart is here right now. And to widen your attention to sense all of us here, that we really are creating a field of attention and a field of caring. And maybe just as many times as you can remember to pause and keep feeling into that, because that's where change arises from.

When we go to that basic inquiry about how did it happen—what really, how did this predicament unfold? This enlarged body, our living earth, in such a state of dis-ease? Most spiritual traditions will describe the suffering that comes from feeling separate, that it's the original suffering—that there's a self in here and a world out there. And out of that separateness, there's a phrase I love: the primal mood of the separate self is fear. These energies of grasping and fear lead us to violating ourselves, each other, and this earth.

It's like if something's "out there"—I think of the term "unreal other"—it becomes unreal. Another person or a racial group or a species or the natural world is other, and then we can violate it. It doesn't have the same heart or vulnerability or subjective reality that we have.

So one of the frames that I find really useful from an evolutionary perspective is the sense that originally there's that fused, part-of-everything consciousness—the primordial mood. And then we emerge into our egoic state, which most of humanity is in, where there is a sense of unreal other. And if we're honest with ourselves, a lot of moments of the day, it feels like that.

And we're waking up—and this is the third, in a simplistic way—the third, emerging to this realization of

interdependence, where we belong to the web. And that's where the "better and better" is coming from. It's from that consciousness.

But humanity's been in this prolonged, kind of arrested place of development in terms of egoic consciousness. And sometimes I think about the consciousness of manifest destiny. Most of you are familiar with, like in the 1800s, this emergence, this sense of entitlement to vanquish and to destroy anything indigenous—unreal others. And it's still operating. I mean, manifest destiny is like that consciousness that those who are in power have the right or entitlement to dominate and to oppress others of other races, of other sexual orientations, ethnicities. And the devastation of our earth is no different. It's this egoic separation that thinks the earth's ours to plunder and violate.

Most of you listening are probably like myself—have a deep love and admiration for Joanna Macy, who's one of the pioneers in caring and acting on behalf of the earth. She says we've been treating earth as if it's a supply source and sewer—extracting resources, pouring waste into it over and over.

And it's described now—again, many of you know this—that we're in the sixth great extinction, worse than when the dinosaurs all disappeared, that there's trauma to all systems. It's estimated that half of all plants and animals and bird species will die off before 2100, that 75% of mammals in the next 300 to 400 years.

I went a lot when I was younger to the Museum of Natural History in New York, and they have an amazing exhibit there on climate change. One scientist writes that this should keep you awake at night. And so what most of us are wondering is, how come it doesn't? What stops us from recognizing what seems to be right in front of us?

If we look at it and are really honest in our own lives and those around us, we're preoccupied with what feels more personal and immediate. We get moved by what's emotional to us in a personal, egoic way. And if we look around the world, anybody that's really hungry, anybody that's in the midst of war, struggling with poverty, with their own health, anybody that's in a major relational crisis—what's immediate is going to, in some way, distract from what's happening.

And then, of course, for many of us where we sense what's happening, it's too upsetting to think about. But I think one of the biggest things is the feeling—and Lou pointed to it—when we sense that we're alone, that there's nothing we can do to make a difference. And I want to speak to that, because that's when we, in some way, close down or cut off and stop listening and looking and attending. And that's where the great suffering is. It's like we become like lobsters in this heating pot where it's gradual.

We're not registering it day to day, the crisis. I'm thinking of one of the phrases from Rumi that has most captured this predicament for me, which goes like this: "Sit, be still, and listen, for you are drunk, and we are at the edge of the roof."

This is what most spiritual traditions point to—that we're in some way drunk, in a trance, asleep. This is

what it means to be arrested in the egoic stage; we're not seeing. And so the deep inquiry becomes: what wakes us up?

One of the things I'd like to share with you is a legend from the Knights of the Round Table that has really impacted me. In this story, Parsifal, a young knight seeking the Holy Grail, stops in a kingdom that has been turned into a wasteland. People are wandering around as if it's business as usual—they're not really noticing what's happening. He goes to see the king in the castle and finds him lying prone, mortally wounded. Parsifal sees this and leaves. It's kind of like "it's not my business" or "what can I do?" and "it's rude to interfere." He's uncomfortable about the situation, so he just leaves.

Then he's confronted on the road by a witch named Kundry, who is enraged that he didn't even bother to reach out to the king. So he returns, more thoughtful, more present, and kneels by the king's bed. With real deep kindness he asks, "What ails thee?" In that moment, the king's cheeks get their normal flush of color and he stands up. Outside, the kingdom awakens from the trance—there are flowers and grass and everything is alive again.

This is a story of a wasteland, and we are becoming a growing wasteland. There's a trance that we're in. The first step—and the reason I love this legend—is to just start right where we are and offer our presence so that we're paying attention. What's going on inside this heart and body? What's going on in my larger body, the earth? Sit, be still, and listen. Feel into what's happening.

Again, Joanna Macy says you don't have to be optimistic. She says trying to be hopeful can wear you out. Just be present.

What we find in starting where we are, in that presence, is that whatever we're really paying attention to, we fall in love with. For me, I go out every day. I spend a lot of time outside, and I pay attention to the trees and the river I live near, and I'm totally in love with it. When I'm in nature, it dissolves that sense of self and other. And then if I see trash on the trail, it hurts—it feels bad—and I pick it up.

So there's this presence with this life, being in this world, in this living web, and then there's compassion for the devastation. We start attending to the clear-cutting, and it feels like our bodies are involved, because they are. Or the loss of the coral reefs, and the sea's dying, and it's us. Or the cruelty to animals that's due to human consuming—they're part of us. So we care, we respond.

I'm saying this as I begin to wrap up here because it feels to me that we'll only respond—people will only wake up and respond to the pain of this earth—if they're in love with this earth, in love with life. The choice to act has to come from the human heart, and that unleashes our intelligence so we can respond wisely because we love.

I heard that Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. Here's what he says: "No one would sleep that night, of course. The world would become religious overnight. We would be ecstatic, delirious, made rapturous by the glory of God." Instead—and

this is me speaking—the stars come out every night and we watch television.

I'm very struck by the fact that in the United States, we spend on average 90% of our time indoors. How do you fall in love with the earth? What's going to happen to our kids in terms of loving the earth? Americans spend eleven hours per day with digital media. How can we love the earth if we're online all the time?

D.H. Lawrence says—and this was 150 years ago—"We're bleeding at the roots because we are cut off from the earth and the sun and the stars."

So the response to this trance is to come into presence, to reconnect with our bodies, with this earth body, to get that we are this living earth—to really get that. Cosmologist Brian Swimme says four and a half billion years ago, the earth was a flaming molten ball of rock. And now it can sing opera. It can care. It can self-heal through these awakening hearts, those of us sitting right here.

We need to belong to our world, love our world—less in a cyber world, more real.

And the last thing, returning to what Lou said about waking up out of the unreal other and being connected, is that we have to act collectively—we must do this together. It simply doesn't work to respond to the suffering of Earth as a separate self.

For myself, being involved with the Teachers Collaborative, being involved locally with Lou and Kristen, I experience this as part of something larger. It's not a self acting; it's just belonging. It's wonderful to be reminded of that together, and I think this is so true.

Thank you so much, Tara. That's a wonderful way to enter into our conversation—very, very beautiful.

So I'd like to invite Ruth. Thank you so much, Ruth, for joining us this morning. I really look forward to your words as well.

Thank you, and welcome everyone. It's exciting to be on this call with all of you, and it did my heart wonders to see the march and to witness the unifying power that can arise when we recognize a need and step into it. This is no small task at all.

I had to educate myself about climate change in order to step into a deeper understanding. I kept feeling the pull at my heart, but it was almost in conflict with so many other pulls that I find in my life—my family, so many other systemic pulls that can capture my attention, like family members who are in the prison system. So I educated myself by connecting with One Earth Sangha and really delving into Naomi Klein's book on the shock doctrine, as well as her latest work. This was truly helpful.

One of the things I realized is that climate disasters are teaching us about the illusion of boundaries. They're teaching us about our utter interdependence, our relatedness, and our reliance on each other. I remember when AIDS was considered an African issue, and then it spread because these things are elemental. We're looking at phenomena that will not be defined by territorial boundaries.

So the notion of territory, through climate change, is calling us to question and examine the structures we are conditioned within, and to look at a realignment in this vitally important area. Our life depends on this necessary attending.

As I educated myself around climate change while feeling the other pulls of heart in our shared humanity, I recognized that there's actually a template—a template of greed at the systemic level that we can begin to recognize. It's almost like a constellation, a skeletal shape of exploitation and oppression that has a systemic quality. We can't always see these things at the individual level, so we must step back and open the lens beyond our special interest groups or silos to see that there is a dynamic relationship—actually a power dynamic—at play that has been operating in our society.

This involves examining the relationship between capitalism and culture, and looking at the dynamics between dominance and subordinate relationships at the systemic level. The planet Gaia, the great mother, has been and continues to be exploited just as poor people, First Nations and other indigenous cultures, people of color throughout the world have been for centuries—to name just a few.

It's important to see that what's happening to the climate and our planet fits into this same template. Poor people and people of color are ongoingly, disproportionately, and systematically disenfranchised by these climate disasters throughout the world.

The NAACP Climate Justice Initiative published a statistic showing that 68% of African Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant—the zone of maximum exposure to pollutants that cause an array of ailments from heart disease, which I had as a child, to birth defects. Communities of color breathe in nearly 40% more pollutants than white people in our country.

Choices are made about where and how things happen as we examine these systems. There are consequences to this kind of greed seeding that has occurred over time, and they're both gross and subtle in their expression. Some of these consequences we can see as separation in our humanness, in our relatedness—denial, hatred, rebellion, and wars. People of color, poor people, and the planet are all rebelling for balance.

I think this is a critical piece for us to examine—not just the particular concern of climate change, though I believe it's crucial at this time, but to also see that it's actually a reflection of a dance that's been going on for some time. It's very difficult for me to see climate change without also seeing these other issues.

This is not a call to point out and create division; it's a call to recognize the divisions that already exist among us. This is not about placing anger or pointing fingers, but about seeing clearly and being willing to not have our focus so narrow that we miss the larger patterns at work.

other people, other situations are left out.

I'm mostly concerned with how our hearts are divided, and I think climate change is changing us, forcing

us to see the delusion of the boundaries we have created. Martin Luther King Jr. said it well from his letter from a Birmingham jail—words you all know: "We're all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

And Shirley Chisholm—some of you may remember she was the first African-American congresswoman back in 1968 and the first black candidate for the U.S. presidency—she said that "service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this planet. It is the very purpose of life, not something you do in your spare time."

So one of the beautiful things about what we can start to look at in terms of what we do next is to most fundamentally maintain our practice, which allows us to know deeply. The Buddha specialized in suffering and the end of suffering. We have many tools that can support our awareness and deepen our presence so that we can act wisely and respond well to what's happening in the world.

Comfort and discomfort can keep us apart, or they can bring us together. I see climate change as a call to this coming together. Martin Luther King again reminds us that "power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

I'd just like to say that we are the environment, and what we do next is important for both presence and love.

Thank you so much, Ruth. Very powerful words, and powerful to be reminded of Martin Luther King and his struggle—such a great example of the disproportionate impact on marginalized and oppressed communities historically through the arc of colonialism and the abuse of those peoples and the earth.

So Jack, welcome. Jack has been so amazing and contributing to the implanting of the Dharma in our Western world.

Thank you, Tanisha. I'm so moved and touched by the words of Ruth and Tara and the rest of you, and the spirit of so many on this call. It's as if our own children are sick, and our grandchildren, and we're at the bedside of the earth as we talk about life in a kind of illness. We're gathered around and now coming together to say: What can we do? How can we respond?

What I'd like to speak on and add to the conversation is sustaining ourselves in this difficult time. It's an age-old question. Born into the human realm, how do we sustain our good heart even though there is dukkha?

The first noble truth of the Buddha: birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, sickness is dukkha, death is dukkha—whether you translate it as sorrow or suffering or insecurity. Lamentation, pain, distress, despair—we're feeling all that. These are the words of the Buddha. Dukkha is distress and despair.

Encounters with what is difficult and painful, which we're experiencing, is dukkha. Separation from what is dear, from the things we care about, is dukkha. Not getting what we want, not having it turn out the way we'd like—all the forms of clinging.

This is part of the human realm, the first noble truth, and it is staring us in the face with climate change, affecting our lives and the lives of beings all around us. We might say this is the first time that terrible suffering is human-caused, and the scale of it is certainly something new and devastating. But even from ancient times, from the Buddha's time, there was much human-caused suffering: the continuing warfare between the Vajjians and the Kosalans and the Sakyans around the Buddha; life expectancy which was half of ours; the illness and slavery that existed then. This is not a new story.

Human beings can create heaven and tend one another, bringing alive love and connectedness and care and wisdom and awakening. Human beings also can contribute to dukkha, to the suffering that's part of the human realm. There's a giant vision offered of the role of the awakened heart and the awakened being, which we all are. "Nobly born," begin the texts. "You are the sons and daughters of the Buddhas. Remember who you really are."

You think you were born into this body as a separate being, and from what Tara and Ruth are reminding us, when you begin to awaken, you awaken in the bodhisattva body—the body of awakening together with all beings. You realize that whether it's a year or a century or a hundred thousand mahakalpas, the bodhisattva has only one way: the way of connection and compassion and care for all beings.

What's beautiful about the vision of the bodhisattva

is it doesn't exclude suffering, but instead the bodhisattva appears together with suffering and is committed in the midst of the difficulty to find in our hearts that wisdom and nobility and dignity that brings light and connectedness and care and the end of suffering to beings.

Not a small project. When you sit in a zendo and begin Zen practice, you recite the four vows starting with: "Sentient beings are numberless, boundless. I vow to save them all." Not a small thing. Even if you look in your own family, they don't necessarily want to be saved by you, much less the people around you. And yet at the same time, this is a vow of the bodhisattva—to tend to all beings.

Or when the Dalai Lama wakes up in the morning and recites the vows from Shantideva's bodhisattva vision: "May I be a resting place for the weary. May I be medicine for the sick. May I be food for the hungry. May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge for those to cross the flood. May I be a lamp in the darkness. May I be a light of Dharma and inspiration for beings. As long as earth and sky exist, as long as beings exist, may I be born and work together with them to bring liberation."

We hear these bodhisattva vows, and we realize that these are the instructions for navigating difficult times. If you look at the life of exemplars like Mahatma Gandhi, who lived in a time of tremendous difficulty—of violence and colonial oppression and the caste system—he took a day a week, no matter

what was happening, bringing down the British Empire. He said, "I'm sorry, I know there's hundreds of thousands of people out marching. This is my quiet day." Once a week, he would quiet his mind and listen in his heart to the action he could take that was most connected with all—the most skillful, dharmic, awakened action they could take together to bring unity and to manifest change.

As Martin Luther King did, or Aung San Suu Kyi, who I was fortunate enough to meet with in Burma earlier this year. She said, "They never really had me in prison"—there she was, arrested for seventeen years because she never hated them. And so we tend our heart. And then as a bodhisattva, we set the compass of our heart with our vows of long-term dedication amidst joy and sorrow, amidst dukkha and sukha, amidst praise and blame and birth and death. The bodhisattva has only one way: the way of compassion and the way of envisioning service and connection with all of life.

One of my favorite examples of this is the great Buddhist elder, Ari Ariyaratne of Sri Lanka, who started the Sarvodaya movement to connect villages across the country—more than half the villages in the country—to dig wells and build schools and collaborate and make peace. Toward the end of the terrible Sri Lankan Civil War, he called all the members of Sarvodaya together to try to support the Norwegian peace plan. Six hundred and fifty thousand people gathered together at the ancient temple at Anuradhapura, and Ari stood up.

He said, "It's taken us five hundred years to get into this difficulty. The Buddhist teachings have us look at the causes of things and not just the effects. So if we look, there are five hundred years of conflict between Buddhists and Muslims and Hindus, and four hundred years of colonial oppression, and two hundred years of economic disparity between the rich, wet parts of the island and the poor, dry parts. So what I have to offer you is the Sarvodaya 500-year peace plan."

If it's taken us five hundred years to get into this, here's the plan to exit: Five years of simply ceasefire and ten years of rebuilding roads and schools and twenty-five years of learning each other's languages and religions, and fifty years of working on an economic program to right the economic injustice and having the poor parts and the rich parts collaborate for everyone's well-being. And after one hundred years, we'll have a grand council to see how we're doing and start all over again. And over five hundred years, I think we can turn Sri Lanka into the island of peace and mercy and awakening that she was meant to be.

I heard these words and I almost wept. In fact, I got a chance to tell this story to the Dalai Lama, knowing he carries the sufferings of Tibet—so much that's happened in the last fifty or sixty years, the weight of that in his heart and his shoulders. And he was grinning, hearing this long-term vision.

Thomas Merton explains it this way. He says, when you are doing the work—he wrote to an activist—do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no result at all, if not, at times, bring about its opposite. As you get used to this, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, and the truth of the work itself.

And so there's a kind of courage in the bodhisattva and a vision that is vast—as vast as the earth and the sky and the galaxies that we are part of. As it says in the Bhagavad Gita, the secret is to act without attachment to the fruits of the actions, and for us to trust the seeds that we plant. Each of us is given, as cells in the awakening organism of the earth, the opportunity to plant our seeds, to contribute our peace, no matter what is happening.

And as we plant the seeds and contribute our peace, as Henry David Thoreau says, "I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, but I have great faith in a seed. Convince me you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

And so we plant our seeds not out of bitterness and not out of fear or confusion, but out of a sense of rightness and truth. And then something else happens.

When my dear friend Wes Nisker, another dharma teacher, was interviewing Gary Snyder recently—Gary being one of the fathers of the American environmental movement for half a century, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet—he said, "Gary, you're eighty-four years old, you see the climate disruption, the oceans rising, the loss of species. What advice do you have for us at this time where there's so much despair and worry and fear?" And Gary looked back steadily and said, "Don't feel guilty. If you are going to save the earth, save it because you love it, not out of anger, not out of guilt, not out of fear."

All those are the source of what creates dukkha—greed and hatred and anger. If you save it, you must save it because you love it.

And it's the love that took those monks out of their forest monasteries to wrap their robes around the greatest trees in the forest and ordained them as the abbots to save that part of the forest from being cut down and logged. It was the love that allowed my teacher and friend, Mahagosananda, after the Cambodian genocide where all nineteen of his own family members were killed and his monastery burned, to walk for fifteen years through the killing fields and the war zones of Cambodia, step by step with hundreds of people behind him, leading them in the chant: "Hatred never ends by hatred, but by love alone is healed." He told them that to return to the earth, to your village and your community, you can't ride a bus, you can't go back in a truck—you have to walk step by step, and with each step, practice loving-kindness and compassion and bring that back alive on this earth.

There is no other way.

So this is our work as a bodhisattva. This is our time. Oh, nobly born, you were born for this. You were called to do this. And in doing this, you plant your seeds and you become part of the whole that is healing itself.

[The facilitator's voice returns, expressing gratitude for the profound teachings and announcing the

transition to breakout groups for participants to share their reflections on waking up to climate change and their responses to it.]

How do we actually deal with this feeling of righteous anger? Sometimes in Buddhism there's confusion around whether you shouldn't feel angry, and there's uncertainty about how to be with strong emotions in response to what's going on—outrage, anger. How do we best use that energy or be in relationship with it?

I'm really glad that question's out there because there's so much messaging in spiritual worlds about how taboo anger is. But we are wired to feel anger. It's natural. It's an intelligent response to harm and violence and dis-ease. So the bottom line is that this is a message, an intelligent message to respond to. When I think of tar sands or the cruelty of factory farms, there's an outrage that comes up in me.

The point isn't to get rid of that energy, but there's a shadow side. When there's a story wrapped around anger—that there's a bad other involved, bad guys out there doing bad things—it perpetuates separation. The storyline actually will distance people. So the deal is we need to listen to the message and not get caught in the emotional trance of it.

When we were about to go to war against Iraq, I was definitely feeling "bad other"—you know, they are the bad ones, they're the violators, those in the administration that wanted to create this ripple of violence. I started doing this reflection when I'd read the newspaper and it would trigger my bad-other feelings. I'd feel the anger and say, "Okay, let's get rid of the storyline, just feel the energy." I'd let the energy be as much as it was.

Then I'd find that underneath it was fear. I'd let that be as much as it was—really, this practice we do of presence and being with. Under the fear was this grieving, and when I let it be big, it was grieving for all the loss. Then I'd let that be big, and under that was care.

So when I could move from that place of caring about people, caring about the suffering, there was an interfaith protest where we all got arrested. But the protest wasn't like a fist-waving angry protest. It was people with posters of Iraqi children and American children. One child at the protest had a sign saying, "Don't bomb them, they're children over there and they hurt too."

My point is not to get lost in the storyline of bad other, but to really be with the energy and find the love underneath that cares about our world.

Thank you. That is so helpful. That is fantastic. Thank you.

Ruth, if I can bring you another question that just came in via email—I think this is a very archetypal question, actually. It's about the split between secular activism, you know, the activists out there, and then those engaged in so-called spiritual quietism on the mat, doing the inner work and dharma practice that's usually about personal transformation. How do we bring those together? What way can they inform each

other? What's your take on that?

That's a great question as well. I've heard it termed as the line between the monastic and the marketplace. How do we bring our awareness to or balance these two—what appears to be separate?

But what I've found is that they're not so separate, this idea of activism and quietism. I actually see that our activism is an extension of our practice. Those of us that have a practice are sitting with what Tara just offered around these intense emotions and the passions or the fire of the heart that gets lit up. We are challenged with how we express our passions in the world from a place of practice and presence.

One thing to keep in mind in moving from our cushions out into the world is that we have a practice of doing no harm—that that's square in our foreheads and in our mind. That's our mantra playing all the time: to do no harm, to be present, to do no harm.

An example that was real palpable for me was being in South Africa right around the time Nelson Mandela was elected. I went around and spoke with a number of nonprofit organizations there. I was really curious about how did you do this without just being enraged all the time? How did you fight apartheid without being enraged all the time?

The message I got from a number of people—maybe not all of them, but most of them—was that the issue of apartheid was never about the person. It was about the system. It was a matter of seeing that it was a system that needed to be dismantled. It wasn't about hating the people. That really stuck with me—to be able to see what needs to happen, bring our quiet practice to a sense of equanimity and presence and clear seeing and groundedness, not the reactivity or the heat that sometimes we find in activism.

Growing up in the civil rights movement, I saw many people die on the vine from righteous rage and righteous indignation. What I've found is that it's really important to bring your heart into activism and to see the humanity and the heart and love that is in all people, even the ones that we have judgment about.

That's wonderful, thank you so much. And again, such a brilliant example to hear about Nelson Mandela. I remember him saying to wish to hate your enemies is like drinking poison, hoping it will kill them. It's poison. So it's this question of heart and how the dharma can inform our response so well.

I'd like to open up now. You've had some breakout groups and questions and dialogue coming. So it would be lovely to hear from our participants. If you have anything you'd like to share or say or ask about, please press 1 on your keypad and Kristen will help to negotiate this next piece. We have about just over 15 minutes left of our time together today. So Kristen, over to you.

Great, thanks everybody. It's just so great to be with all of you. I'm so grateful to all the teachers and to be able to do this work as a sangha with you.

As Tanissara said, please press 1 if you have any questions. We'll take your question now. I see some hands raising—this is wonderful. Let's go over to Jeffrey.

"Thank you. My question comes from the last person who spoke about how people in South Africa coped with apartheid by seeing it as the system. My concern is: how much progress can we really make working on climate change if we don't address the nature of our political system that supports it—the massive amounts of power and money in politics, the oil and gas industries, and the basic structure we see in rulings like Citizens United, where corporations have way too much power? I've decided to try dividing my time to work on both, but I'd be interested in what anyone else has to say about that."

This is a profound question with two dimensions. The personal part asks which should we tend to? I believe we each have particular gifts. Some might have the gift of being a political organizer. Some might excel at systemic and systematic thinking, putting their heart into getting money out of politics or working to change how corporate charters have created rampant, freewheeling exploitation. Others may tie their robes around trees or go to preschools, elementary schools, and middle schools, educating the next generation so they can act wisely. The answer is all of the above—listening to your heart to discern what you're particularly drawn to contribute, because we need all of those seeds.

Regarding the underlying question about addressing systemic change: absolutely. But there's an even deeper question you allude to—the world doesn't need more energy, more food, or more things. It needs less greed, less hatred, and less ignorance of the sense of separation, less delusion. Beyond the systemic level lies the deepest dharma level: a kind of education and awakening in ourselves, our community, and the community of humanity. This represents the biggest systemic change of all. I see tremendous potential in the internet connecting us and in the extraordinary changes happening that may actually aid us in this process.

The ground is moving very rapidly under our feet as we awaken into our reality and as people mobilize and organize. By the end of these conversations and as we move forward together as a dharma community, we'll be offering connections and networks we can align with—people of faith, activist communities, people on the front lines, organizations with skillful strategies. The main message is that we're not alone. We're doing this together.

Let's hear from Julia now. "I think Tanissara touched on this just now. My question is: how can our sangha facilitate sharing good news about initiatives happening across the world so we can gain inspiration and take heart that there is movement?"

There are indeed many extraordinary things happening. I want to mention a book that offers perspective on our capacity for positive change—not current climate news, but Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. This Harvard philosopher and anthropologist charts several hundred years of human history, showing the gradual reduction in slavery (though people are still enslaved), better treatment of children, gradual freedom for women (though conditions remain difficult in parts of the world), and gradual reduction in warfare. If you need encouragement about humans' capacity for greater consciousness, I highly recommend this book. It offers the sense that you're part of this great movement of awakening that

is actually happening.

As this movement grows and mobilizes, we're witnessing tremendous creativity emerge. Naomi Klein's latest book, *This Changes Everything*, offers realistic yet positive perspectives we should all engage with. The work of Bill McKibben and 350.org, the Idle No More mobilization of First Nations peoples—these movements offer excellent opportunities for connection and collaboration.

So we have about ten minutes or so. Can we take another question? Let's go to Louise.

Well, that's interesting—my phone is starting to beep. But I had two suggestions in response to the last couple of questions. One is about systemic work—Joanna Macy also talks about another level, which is the consciousness behind the systems. So that's another level we can work on in changing consciousness. That does translate into eventually changing systems. And then as far as good news...

Sorry, I lost you there. We don't get to hear the good news. I'm sure we can all look around and see plenty of good news, but we didn't get to hear Louise's version.

All right, so it looks like we'll have time for one more. How about Stephanie?

Hi, can you hear me? Yes, we can hear you. Go ahead.

Well, I had a really interesting experience a couple weeks ago. I live in Houston, which we call the Petro Metro—one of the big centers of the fossil fuel industry. A couple weeks ago, I went to a conference on climate and energy put on by a group called the Heritage Foundation, which you may know is a pretty conservative think tank that's certainly trying to bolster the case for continued fossil fuel use. One of the speakers there gave a presentation about his visit to the People's Climate March.

Just tell us what's the heart of it for you. What's the question that's deep in your heart?

Well, when they were presenting, this man started off with a picture of Buddhists meditating before the march, saying, "Oh my gosh, look at these crazy people." Of course, being a Buddhist, I took that pretty deeply, and all these questions about anger are certainly arising for me. I think this may be something that will come up more and more—that people may be targeting groups as has happened in the past. How can we work with this to make it a strength for this movement?

I'm going to come in here because we have a few minutes left. This is a really good question, and the wonderful thing to know is that we have time throughout this whole month to continue exploring and deepening into these kinds of questions that have been brought forward together.

I think it's okay that we're targeted. As Martin Luther King spoke about, sometimes you actually need to bring out the toxins and bring out the poisons so that they can be addressed with compassion in a very direct way. There's some heart of justice that's there to be touched in every being, although in some it's still deeply covered over. So I'm not worried about that. I think that is actually part of the movement that

eventually will bring us together.

That's brilliant. Thank you for that reminder.

So again, thank you so much, everyone. We're going to start the wrap-up now for the last few minutes of our call together. I can't tell you how much I appreciate—we all appreciate—your presence, giving your time. We know that those on the call and those who will be listening to the recordings—this is just the tip of the iceberg to our deep sense of care and concern and the challenge we're in. But it's so helpful to know that we're here together, on the same page, looking together at how to embody this bodhisattva energy and how to find the most authentic, realistic, and powerful responses that we can.

Next Sunday, please do join us again at the same time. We'll be hearing from Reverend Angel Kyodo Williams, Aya Anandabodhi, and Susie Harrington—three accomplished practitioners and teachers who have much to offer in furthering our discussion.

As I mentioned, all of this will be feeding into the development of an Eco-Sutta training, which will be launched next year. I also want to acknowledge that One Earth Sangha is a new initiative. Everyone working on One Earth Sangha is offering their time on a volunteer basis. We'd like to embody and ground One Earth Sangha more deeply, and for that we value support in all forms—particularly any dana and financial offerings that can be given through the website, which will go directly toward ensuring that this important initiative becomes a movement in itself, a platform for all of us to find our home within as we navigate the times ahead.

I'd also like to invite Josh to speak. Maestro Conference has been so generous in offering their platform freely as dana to host our call. Josh, would you share a few words about Maestro?

"Thank you. My name is Joshua Edwards, and I'm with Maestro Conference. We're honored and excited to support the Mindfulness and Climate Action Initiative with the technology you're using today. If you'd like more information about Maestro Conference—either for hosting your own events or learning about our other upcoming world-changing conversations—please dial the number 1 on your telephone keypad, Skype dial pad, or computer keyboard. We'd love to send you information about how you can be involved in turning presentations into conversations. We're so glad to be here with you all today. You can certainly stay on and continue to connect in small groups after the formal part of the call is complete."

Thank you, Josh. Just to mention, you can continue to email us at OneEarthSangha. We're setting up a Facebook group where we can continue the conversation—you'll hear about that soon.

As in the way of the Dharma, this has been wonderful to draw this energy together. I'd like to invite Ruth, if you would, to share the blessings as we finish. As is in our tradition, to share the good karma, the good energy, and the prayerfulness from our gathering for the welfare of our earth and our planet. Please, Ruth, over to you to close.

"Thank you so much. Thanks to all the good hearts collected here. Let me invite you to take a breath or two right here and now, and to feel the aliveness of our sharing together. Know that we are a sangha. May we envision our service to life. May we tend to our hearts. May we set our compass to compassion, connection, and care. May we plant our seeds and contribute to peace. May we be part of the healing of our home, our earth, for the benefit of all sentient beings. May our practice be of service to all beings in all directions without exception."

Thank you, everyone. Stay well, go well until next week.

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