Mindfulness and Climate Action: 2

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:09:29

Welcome everyone, and welcome back to those who joined us last week, along with a very warm welcome to all of you joining us for the first time today.

My name is Tanisra, and I am the moderator and host for our conversation on Mindfulness, Dharma and Climate Action. We live in increasingly precarious times regarding the impact on the natural environment from our ways of living. It is clear that unless we radically change our relationship to Mother Earth, to each other, and to ourselves, we will jeopardize a sustainable world for future generations.

To explore these issues today, I'd like to welcome our teachers, for whom I'm very grateful. We have Aya Anandabodhi Bhikkhuni from Wales, who is a Theravada nun in the forest tradition for over twenty years, currently living in Placerville in Northern California near Sacramento. Reverend Angel Kyodo Williams is author of *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* and founder of the Center for Transformative Change, based in Berkeley, California. And Susie Harrington, guiding teacher for Desert Dharma based in Moab, Utah.

Welcome to our teachers who will be reflecting on the global issue of climate change as it interacts with the deeper social causes and issues of justice. We look forward to exploring that together.

Before we move to our teachers, I'd also like to introduce our team: Kristin Barker, co-founder of One Earth Sangha and member of Washington DC Insight; Yong Oh, teacher at Chattanooga Insight in Tennessee; and Barry Bettman, who is representing and helping us host through Maestro Conference today. Thank you to all of our team working in the background.

I'd also like to welcome Lou Leonard, co-founder of One Earth Sangha and leader of the Climate Change Program at the World Wildlife Fund, who is supporting us with scientific input.

Before I hand over to Lou to introduce himself and welcome us, I'd like to encourage us as we arrive into this call together and engage this very intense issue to take a deep breath. As we take that breath, feel yourself coming into your body, into your seat, and into your presence, bringing attention to the sensation of your body, the feet touching the ground, and the pressure of sitting.

As we connect with that, we're connecting with this earth element. This body is part of the earth element and the element of breath and warmth in the body. Just taking a few deep breaths as we arrive here together.

Lou, if I could hand over to you, please, to introduce yourself and welcome us, then introduce

Anandabodhi as our first speaker.

Thank you, Tanisra, and welcome, everyone. As Tanisra said, I'm helping support this conversation with some background on the science and policy of climate change. You will have all received a background paper that was prepared by Kriti Kanko, a scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund, and myself, describing some of the basics of the science. If you haven't received that, just let us know by sending an email, and we will get that out to you.

For this call, it's very appropriate that we should look at some of the equity and justice elements of the climate crisis, because those concepts are really at the heart of both the causes and harmful effects of climate change. There are a couple of elements of the science that are useful to have in mind as we enter this conversation. First, carbon dioxide, the most significant greenhouse gas, once deposited in our atmosphere, lasts for centuries. Second, unlike other forms of pollution, the effects of greenhouse gases are felt cumulatively over time. So the emissions that were deposited by burning coal, for instance, in the United States and Europe in the 1800s and the last century are contributing to the warming we're feeling today.

You could think of it like a bathtub where we're filling up with pollution, and so it moves out of the system much more slowly than when we put it in. Right now we are adding...

Lou, just to interrupt you here, you're breaking up quite a lot, so I'm wondering whether we should hand over to Aya Anandabodhi and then come back, because at the end of the teachers' presentations, you're going to speak to us more about the scientific import.

That sounds great. Thank you, Tanisra.

So, Aya Anandabodhi, I welcome you again and thank you so much for being here with us today. I'm really looking forward to sharing this presence and space with you and your words.

Thank you so much, Tanisra. I'm very grateful that this is happening and for all the organizers who've made these calls happen. When I came to America five years ago, I was sent to teach and I would speak about climate change and about our concerns. We were told, "We don't want you to talk about those things. We want you to talk about Dharma, about enlightenment, about inspiring aspects." And so we were quiet for some time. But once one is conscious of the severity and seriousness of the situation that we are all in, it's pretty impossible to stay quiet.

So I'm very heartened to see that now people are beginning to speak in the Dharma communities, are beginning to speak more openly and publicly about the realities of climate change and how we can meet that. I know for a long time people would find it overwhelming. "It's all just too much. I don't want to go there because it's too big. I don't know what to do." Or sometimes I've heard that Dharma teachers shouldn't speak about climate change because it's political.

So these are all reasons why for a long time, for many years, there has been silence or just quiet whispers here and there. I'm very grateful that this is being opened up now, because I feel it's vital that we bring this awareness of the reality of the context within which we are living into our practice and into our right action in the world.

I see the climate situation as, yes, political—there does need to be political change. And it is social, because it affects first of all people in more disadvantaged situations worldwide, and eventually all of us. People and animals and forests and land. Those who can't speak up for themselves are often the first affected. So it has massive repercussions.

And it is also an ethical issue. I feel as spiritual practitioners that we have an ethical requirement to open our minds and hearts to the situation that is going on and to really take in the enormity of it, the pain of it, the sorrow that comes with it, and to let that touch us and motivate us to respond in a skillful and active way.

I also feel that this dilemma we are all in is a deeply spiritual matter. As the Buddha points out so clearly, we are interconnected. We are interbeing. We are interconnected with everything on this earth, in this universe. The situation that we are now in—that Lou can speak about in more scientific detail later—is partly natural and to a large degree the making of our human greed, hatred, and delusion that has been running rife for so long. Because this is now so deeply ingrained on a corporate level and on a political level, it feels sometimes overwhelming. How can we ever do anything to change this? How can we meet this?

A number of people have written in questions expressing anger, feeling overwhelmed, and feeling frustrated that their communities, their sanghas don't speak about climate change, feeling isolated. I think it's very important to look at all of these questions.

We are in a situation where those who hold the greatest power are fully motivated by greed and are not at all aware or conscious of the consequences, even for their own families, let alone the rest of this planet Earth. And that can bring us feelings of hopelessness, of rage, of fear, of impotence.

I feel it's very important that we recognize that each of us is part of the creation of this situation. As long as we put everything out onto somebody else, we remain as victims and we remain impotent. But I think there's probably nobody on this call who hasn't driven in a car, hasn't ridden on a plane, hasn't used plastic. We're all part of this in our little ways, or maybe some bigger ways.

So first of all, just to acknowledge: we've all contributed to this. We're all part of the creation of this rather disastrous situation that we're in. And we can all do something to start to turn the tides. As long as we think it's got to be somebody else out there, we keep ourselves stuck, we keep the whole situation stuck, because the people who are creaming off the benefits—the short-term benefits—are not motivated to change.

We need to take on the truth of all having been part of this, feel the sorrow of that, and cultivate the wish to really be motivated to do something to turn our lives in the right direction.

It's inevitable that there will be fear, there will be anger. These emotions are energy. Fear is energy that's trapped. Anger is energy that's pushing against something else. But we can use this with mindfulness. We can use this energy as powerful energy for transformation, to be actively involved in whatever way each individual listening feels they can make a change.

It doesn't matter if we're young or old, able-bodied or disabled, highly intellectual or simple—it doesn't matter what our qualities are. We each have something to bring to this situation.

I want to mention that we often think of nature as being something outside of ourselves. We go into nature, but we are nature—we are part of nature. And nature is diverse, and it is responsive, and it is creative, and it is totally interconnected. Each of us is part of this. It's not that one of us has to change the world, but each of us has to find what our part is and do that.

Whether it's speaking out, whether it's going out on the streets to demonstrate, whether it's developing alternative energies, getting into politics—whatever it may be, you need to really connect with and look at how you can make a difference. And don't be afraid to speak up. If your sangha doesn't want to talk about climate change, don't be afraid to speak up.

Look into questions like: Why is there this inertia? Why is there this resistance? Because this is not other than our practice. This is the context within which our practice is happening. We're trying to meditate and develop a calm mind in a room that is burning.

We're not going to get very far if we don't first look at the situation and respond to that, using our wisdom and right action to address the circumstances we find ourselves in as best as we can.

I've also spoken to a number of people who have been involved in climate action for many years and are starting to feel hopeless—wondering if their efforts are going anywhere, questioning whether change is possible. I want to really encourage everyone: if those feelings arise, please don't be stopped by them. Don't believe in them. Because if we all give up, then of course it becomes hopeless. But we each have a possibility to influence.

Through calls like this, through talking in your communities, through bringing up these issues—not in a fundamentalist way or in a way that turns people off, but just bringing them into consciousness—the issues of climate change and the ways we can influence them, just by connecting with each other, we start to create a strong force.

Who knows where we are in the scheme of things? We don't know if we can make great changes and all will be well. We don't know if we are too late. We don't know whether there's just a little avenue within which we can squeeze through. We don't know, but we still have to respond with motivation to the reality

of the situation.

Some people in the dharma community say, "Well, everything changes, all arises and passes away, so why get involved?" That's a little bit like having a mother or grandmother who's aging and saying, "Well, she's going to die anyway, so why bother?" But we don't say that. We say, "Oh, she's precious. She's given so much. We want to make sure she's cared for, that her years are comfortable, that she's respected and loved."

It's the same with our Mother Earth. If we just say, "Well, all arises and ceases," it's a heartless response. It doesn't bring in the compassion the Buddha so clearly lived and taught.

I really want to encourage everyone not to be bound by fears or doubts, and not to be trapped by anger, but to use the energy of fear and anger with awareness to motivate you—to focus that energy and move it into action. Get past the doubts and just respond. Do what you can. Speak out, act, do what you can.

"Beautiful words, Ayya Anandabodhi, and a beautiful reminder. As I listen, it really brings me into my body and into my heart. I can feel a sense of softening and opening and connection and tenderness, and that beautiful sense of our Mother Earth like a grandmother—all that she's given. Thank you so much for that nourishing support.

I'm so grateful that Reverend Angel Kyodo Williams is able to join us. Her work is so important and meaningful. I listened to Reverend Angel recently at a Shambhala Center after the People's Climate March in New York and was incredibly moved and motivated by her words. Reverend Angel, we're so grateful you can be with us today."

"Thank you. Really, as Ayya said, I'm deeply moved that this is happening. I think many of us have been in places and have had experiences such that we feel like it's long overdue. At the same time, all the people who have chosen to participate in this call, and particularly the organizers, are really at a turning point—an incredibly important turning point in what is a significant crisis facing all of us. So I'm really happy to be here.

I want to continue with what Ayya was speaking about so beautifully, particularly the aspect she referenced about the human contribution to climate change. As many people know, there's been a lot of discussion about how much of this is natural and how much is contributed by human beings. There was some degree of debate about that, but now clearly the science has come out from many different directions showing that overwhelmingly, the contribution is human. It's a human interference with natural patterns.

In terms of the social aspect, one of the things I think we're often not speaking of sufficiently is that not only is human contribution significantly impacting the environment and our habitat—our place to live in good connection with all other beings on the planet—but that our contribution, as Ayya said, we all have driven cars and used plastic bottles and those kinds of things. But at the root, the degree of

overconsumption that humans have contributed on this planet has been a result of those poisons that afflict us: greed, hatred, and delusion.

I want to speak about them quickly in terms of looking at greed very specifically in the form and dominance of hypercapitalism that the West has contributed to, most specifically in the form of colonialism over the last 500 years that has continued to morph. I'm not saying we shouldn't trade among human beings, but rather this hypercapitalism that places arbitrary values on human beings and planetary resources is very much the greed that is at the root of this drive to overconsume—way beyond what is needed, way beyond what helps us thrive as human beings."

At its base, this hypercapitalist system contains a fundamental anger that places different peoples at different levels of society depending on what is perceived as their value. Are they contributors of labor? Are they to be bought and sold? As a result, we have developed a structure that elevates the white race over other races, then divides people along racial lines.

We are dealing with something that, for many people, is not an overtly racialized view in their daily lives—they are not walking around being consciously racist. Rather, we are all contributing to and participating in a structure where anger, racism, and separation are at the root, dividing people. When we are unable to look at this clearly and see it for what it is through the lens of our practice, we unwittingly contribute to this structure that keeps us divided. This system is designed to perpetuate institutions and structures of marginalization of some people, constant deprivation of access to resources for others, and the ordinary unconscious bias that pervades all our lives.

Finally, in the form of ignorance, all of this is only able to manifest because we are experiencing what I believe is an unprecedented, very deep disconnect from our planet and from other peoples. This disconnection results from these systems, these structures, these institutionalized and insidious forms of racism and superiority that are designed to keep us separated. They prevent us from questioning the kind of valuation of people and planet that enables our resources to be consumed in such a way that allows a very small group of people to maintain elite status at the cost of each of our own hearts, our own ability to truly meet one another heart to heart, mind to mind. We carry these seeds of bias, these seeds of discrimination, these seeds of confusion—ways of looking at each other with suspicion, all seeded there because of the greed and the inability of those operating from that place to see clearly, or perhaps their indifference to the degree they perpetuate suffering.

One of the things I feel most gratified about regarding the Buddhist community's engagement with these issues is that we have a set of teachings that provides us with lenses through which we can look. As I just spoke about the three poisons, those lenses are available to us, offering our larger sangha the opportunity not only to take up our individual practices and recognize our contributions to climate change and to a racialized system of superiority, but also to embrace a unique responsibility as a larger community.

We can begin to look at how we, as people practicing these teachings and truly bringing them to heart,

seeking to embody them in our actual lives, can respond more collectively. We can have the kinds of conversations about the root issues that have contributed to climate change. Climate change is a manifestation—a tangible, increasingly palpable manifestation—of behaviors and a social ego construct that has been operating for hundreds of years.

What we're presented with at this time is not only an opportunity to look at climate change, which completely makes sense, but also, in concert with the nature of our practice, to choose to say: "This is the behavior I'm seeing. These are the outcomes I'm seeing. What is at the root? What is at the root?" We must get down to the root, however painful, disconcerting, or overwhelming it may be to be confronted with the ways we have not seen or been able to respond to these things before. This would be true for us as sanghas as well.

More importantly, I would say that what is required and most useful is that because we get to look at these things through a lens of shared teachings, we finally have the opportunity to truly utilize the notion of sangha in the way it was always meant to be used. Not merely as a group of people we do things with—which is often the case in many sanghas that function more like fellowship, particularly in the West—but to actually rethink and reimagine our utilization and relationship to sangha as a whole. A community of people we are in heart with, getting down to the root of things that impact us all, doing so in such a way that we support one another and pull back from the hyper-individualized ways we draw from Western society and its constructs.

"Thank you so much, Reverend Angel, for your words. I really feel there's so much work here, the invitation to go so much more deeply into the work, to look at the systemic level of the colonial mindset that we have somehow all been seeded within. It's like decolonizing our heart and mind so that we can come into this deeper relationship and out of the brutality of that colonized place—brutality against others, marginalized people of color, and ourselves, our own hearts and bodies and minds, and of course the earth. Thank you for this wonderful invitation into where we have to go, this deep heart of sangha, reclaiming and healing the soul of sangha, where there's a deeper web of life. Thank you so much for opening those doors for us and inviting us deeper into that piece of work.

Our last teacher this morning is a person of great warm heart who does wonderful work and feels so deeply with the wilderness, works in the wilderness, and teaches meditation and wilderness retreats. I'd like to warmly welcome Susie and invite you to contribute to our conversation."

"Thank you so much, Janice, and thank you, Aya, and Reverend, for what you have offered. As we all move into this, and as you were talking, Reverend, I was thinking of a friend of mine, Terry Tempest Williams, who lives in our community and has been speaking out for the earth for a long time. I remember her once saying that somebody told her, 'You are married to sorrow.' She replied, 'No, I just don't choose to look away. My curiosity is greater than my fear.'

I feel like that's what we're doing right now. We're saying we choose not to look away. I think that in itself

is a huge shift. What we're doing is very much an extension of our practice because it's saying that we prefer and are willing to step into truth. That's what the Buddha was pointing to over and over again—it's the truth that will free us, not our wishes, not our ideas, not our isolation."

So I'm just so grateful to all of us stepping into that truth together. And one of the pieces that I want to bring in is the outsourcing, as Reverend Angel talked about—the outsourcing of the cost of our actions, how that's been displaced socially and how we've split ourselves into classes as a result. Another place that we've outsourced these costs is environmentally.

The extraction of the resources that we burn, creating climate change—these resources, as they've been extracted, as we all know, have impacted oceans, rivers, people, and animals all over the world. I'm very aware of this where I live in southeastern Utah. Roughly thirty-five percent of the land here is leased to the gas and oil industry and is potentially open to development, and much of it is being developed.

Even more concerning is what's happening about three hours north of where I live, on the border of our county. The first oil sands development in the U.S. just opened there, developed by a Canadian company that was also involved in the development in Alberta. If you don't know about oil sands, I really encourage you to inform yourself. You can search online for "Alberta oil sands" and add Joanna Macy's name—you'll find a YouTube video of a flyover. It reveals an incredibly devastating form of extraction. You're basically leaving behind a wasteland, a black, lifeless wasteland where nothing can grow. It has impacted the water in Alberta so severely that people downstream have been told not to drink it.

And now it's starting here, in a very remote, wild, beautiful place on the north edge of a county that has 10,000 people. The people here aren't going to be able to provide sufficient resistance to stop this—it's going to require a much greater level of awareness and activity. The impact will be on that land directly, but what they're expecting to extract twenty years from now—they hope to get forty to sixty million barrels a day. That is enough, in and of itself, to tip the climate over. It represents a huge amount of carbon dioxide being proposed for release into the air.

How we can respond and act to this—the XL pipeline that has been fairly effectively stopped at this point has shown that stopping infrastructure can have impact. It's so important that we move out of the idea that we can't have impact, because we are having impact. There are things that need to be responded to.

One of the things I'm so aware of in our spiritual practice, as I talk about these things and as we all share and step into this, is that we have the idea that we come to our spiritual practice for relief, for ease, for happiness. But as Aya Nandabodi said so clearly, it's like trying to have a calm mind in a room that is burning. What frees us, what we really need, is the truth. And that involves being willing to step in.

Yul Rinpoche speaks of "the unbroken receptivity to truth." Gloria Steinem says, "The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off." I want to propose that the truth will set us free, but first it will break our hearts.

It's easy, as we feel into this and acknowledge where we are, to feel a personal sense of overwhelm. As I and Nandabodi spoke to this, I want to say more about it because I think it's the thing that holds us back, that locks us in place so that we don't move—and we're in a time when movement is so important. The overwhelm, when we see the depth and breadth of what's happening, is a movement towards collapse and separation. We so need to move instead towards connection.

When we believe in the illusion of self, when we don't see clearly in that way, the world becomes a cause, a separate thing. Instead, it's like tending to our own wounds and the wounds of those that we love who are right here. Einstein has this beautiful quote: "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of our consciousness. This delusion is really a prison for us, restricting us to personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our path must be to free ourselves from this prison by expanding our circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty."

Our wise scientist ancestors are pointing so clearly to these expanding circles—our ability to see harm and our desire to not do harm that is so much bigger than our small self. As we can move into that and feel our connection, then the alternative to overwhelm is compassion. That is what allows us to move and not get collapsed and stuck.

One of the things that helps us so much, that I'm so grateful for, is being in nature, connecting to what's here. Tara last week spoke to that beautifully—taking time to connect and really being willing to value truth more than our comfort, letting go of the resistance and the denial and being willing to feel our emotions as Aya spoke to.

Joanna Macy speaks beautifully of this, of being willing to connect and to cry for our planet, to feel rage about it. She says, "It is a measure of your open heart. As your heart breaks open, there will be room for the world to heal." And that feels so true to me.

I know it's mattered deeply to me to allow my heart to break open again and again, to feel touched by what is happening. And that allows us to love in every moment. Everything that has ever changed in a wholesome way has to come from love.

From this compassion that moves us, what can we envision? How can we move? What becomes possible? One of the things that Reverend Angel spoke to so beautifully is that this is not just about addressing climate change—it's about transforming everything in a way that is so much more whole and real. Looking local, doing things that empower people rather than corporations, moving away from consumption, connecting with each other.

This is allowing us to move, encouraging us to move toward the good—the deepest good—rather than from some idea that we're being cut off or won't get what we want. That idea comes from a sense of greed,

from losing touch with what is most important.

One of the things that moves us out of overwhelm is to do something—to acknowledge what you're already doing. It's really like our practice: we know what we know, you're doing what you're doing, and then we keep moving. We do more. Our love will always have more capacity. What else can you do? What's possible? Can you spend more time being creative with others, changing the system, changing your habits, sharing with others?

This whole movement feels to me like it's all about the precept of not doing harm. Locally here we have a soil called cryptobiotic soil that grows on the sand. It holds the sand together and serves as the starting point from which other plants grow. If you don't know about it at first, when you walk on it, it gives this crunching sound—kind of interesting. But once you learn about the harm your footsteps cause and the long-term effect on this crust, to step on it becomes painful.

I think we're in that phase of adjusting and understanding the impact of our steps, learning how to adjust how we walk and where we walk in order to be sensitive to all beings everywhere.

And we don't have to do this alone. We're part of a whole movement. We don't need to feel alone. I want to mention two resources: Carrie Nelson has been doing work with groups for a while to help people move in their communities. You can find her at placeforpeace.org. There's also a Sustainable World Sourcebook that you can find through Google—it's full of ideas for how you can work and do things in your community with other people.

It's going to be messy. We don't know how to do this. So we just have to start doing it.

Thank you, Ayaan and Abodi.

Before we move into breakout groups for discussion, I'd like to invite Lou back into the call. Lou, particularly regarding what Susie shared about the tar sands and what's happening there, do you have anything to contribute from your perspective?

Hi, Tanisara. Thank you. I'm worried that my connection might not be great, so perhaps I could share at the beginning of the full Q&A just to give us a better chance of being heard.

Your connection's good. Your connection's good now. Go for it.

Okay, just quickly—I think one of the important things to remember is that in order for us to stay below the temperature threshold that scientists tell us will bring the greatest danger, places where we're going to really start hitting tipping points, we have a limited budget: a limited amount of carbon dioxide and other gases that we can emit into the atmosphere.

The thing about tar sands is that it is such a carbon-intensive energy source, in addition to all the other horrible impacts to the earth and to the First Nations people in Alberta. It's very carbon-intensive, and it

actually produces a fuel oil that is largely used by wealthier segments of the world's population, leaving us very little room in that budget for things like electricity and energy to cook—basic needs for all people.

Just to give you a couple of numbers: if the tar sands that are currently being extracted in Alberta were all to be extracted and burned, they would use up half of the remaining budget that we have in the atmosphere. That would leave us only about eight years of CO2 before we start hitting some of those very dangerous tipping points.

So thinking about those kinds of impacts from tar sands as well as other sources of energy—it's important to understand both the impact they have on the atmosphere and how they benefit the wealthier, more powerful segments of society versus the energy needs of the poor.

I'll stop there. Thank you.

Well, that's very clear. As I'm listening to you, it's really important for us to educate ourselves. One of the things we'll be moving to post our series of calls is an Ecosattva training session. As a mindfulness dharma Buddhist collective, we want to really get behind some of the actions happening and support our challenge to things like the tar sands and other issues that are going on. We want to translate our engagement into actual action and connect and join other groups.

So let's just leave it there for now. I think at this point in our call, we're going to move into breakout groups. I'm going to hand over to Kristen to guide us in that process.

The theme we're going to explore when we go into our groups for discussion—and Kristen will say a few words about that and encourage you to stay for this process. Of course, if you don't feel comfortable and would just like to meditate through the next ten or fifteen minutes while we go into discussion, that's quite fine too.

But if you join the breakout groups—and I encourage that—we're going to discuss together: Where are you in response to the teachers' input? What touches you and where do you feel moved to speak from?

So Kristen, if I can hand over to you to guide us into the next process, with Barry supporting that.

Thank you so much, Thanissara. Greetings, everyone. As the other co-founder of Dharma Sangha, I have to say it's such an honor and privilege to be with you on these calls. I'm especially excited that we can support the ability—as Susie was saying—to move into closer and closer connections, actually connecting with others on this call around the issues we've discussed so far.

So we're inviting you to share in these breakout groups—we'll make it all happen for you. What is arising for you? What is your response to the teachers' input so far? Was there anything in particular that touched you? Offer this sacred space for others to share and let that in. This, I think, we see as the cultivation of sangha. It's something that we feel is so vital.

Welcome back everyone. Thank you for taking that moment to either explore this internally or with other participants on this global call.

We're going to move into the Q&A session now. If you have a question you'd like to ask into the full field here, you can press the number 1 on your phone keypad or your Skype keypad or your MC Dialer keypad—again, not your keyboard.

I would just ask, with so many of us on the call, please keep that question brief. Don't feel too constrained, but just know that we'll try to get to as many people as possible, so keep it as brief as possible.

If you have a question, go ahead and press 1 on your phone keypad.

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Let's start with George. George, what is your question?

"I wasn't on the call last week, and I was wondering about an educational program mentioned in the email. Is there something beyond these series of calls? Are other materials being prepared?"

Tanisra, would you like to speak to that?

"Yes, we are launching a training called the Ecosat Training on April 22nd, Earth Day, next year. It will be a three-month program, and you'll hear more about it before this series concludes. If you're on our mailing list, you'll receive updates."

Thank you, George. Now let's go to Vanessa from Canada. Welcome, and what is your question?

"My question is about engagement. This call has focused on equity issues underlying climate change, and I think many of us have more power than we realize—socioeconomically or in our communities. Yet when climate change threatens people's fundamental sense of being in the world, it becomes very hard for them to face it and lean into the issue.

I do social advocacy work in healthcare, and I find resistance to addressing climate change openly because of the personal threat people feel to their life choices and way of being. In our very conservative political culture in Canada, I wonder how to engage people in conversation and action in ways that are non-threatening and help them manifest the power and influence they have for creating change and demanding political action."

Aya Anandabodhi, would you take this question?

"Thank you. This is something we all encounter, because acknowledging the reality of our situation is indeed a huge threat to our way of living. It can be a very slow process trying to convince people who aren't open. It may be more fruitful personally to involve yourself in larger social actions—like the People's Climate March on September 21st, or with international groups like 350.org who organize events.

Rather than trying to convince people, engage yourself in meaningful action and let that arise naturally in conversation as example. I've also found visual imagery quite helpful through social media. There's an artist named Chris Jordan from Seattle whose extraordinary photographs show the effects of our consumerism—particularly his work on albatrosses and plastic waste. When people see those images, something awakens. It's not about convincing someone, but simply showing them: this is actually what's happening. This is the result of our actions."

So that's what I would suggest. Does that help in any way?

Let's take one more question. Emily Shaw, what is your question?

"Hi, so I was wondering—my question was actually pretty similar to the last one, so you can choose someone else if you'd like to."

Since this is such a challenge for so many of us—working with environments that are not receptive—Reverend Angel, would you like to speak to that?

"Sure. Emily, would you like to say what your question is specifically?"

"I haven't been involved in climate action groups that I would like to be, and I'm a little bit afraid that it's going to be really intense. Maybe the culture of the group would be very pressuring for people who are just entering that space. I guess I'm curious about the really strong divide it feels like there is between activism and just regular people who don't even talk about these issues."

This is a good question for me. I'm involved and have been sitting on the board of a green organization for ten years now. I think there are many groups to choose from, and I'll say off the top that many environmental organizations have changed their tone over time. Much of the antagonism and intensity has actually shifted because all of us have seen that overwhelming people is not necessarily the best strategy. That conversation is happening very actively amongst climate groups. I sit with folks from thirty big green groups in the country, and we really see a big conversation shift about approach.

That said, like anything else—even like sangha—it is a kind of community you're going to belong to. Finding a good fit is what's important. There are many, many organizations doing work out there in ways that are actually really uplifting and effective. They're trying to approach the work in a way that includes the reality that all of us have to actually live here together, recognizing that merely an antagonistic way of being isn't going to be effective.

I would say find something close to your heart in terms of issues and start there. It's the easiest place to enter.

I'd also add to the list of resources a stunning site created by designer Maya Lin, who designed the Vietnam Memorial when she was twenty-one. It's called whatishappening.net. I encourage everyone, wherever you are in the world, to visit that site. It gives you a very interactive way to not only see what's happening in different places of the world, but also to make contributions of your own—to recognize losses you may have observed or actions your community may be taking.

The last thing I want to say is that in Buddhist communities, we're often very concerned about challenging people and finding ways to do things that are not threatening. But what we're up against is something that is fundamentally threatening—and that's actually what people are responding to. There is a fundamental threat to our lives on this planet, and that gets papered over by the threat to the lives we're living in this particular moment.

I would encourage us to be a little more willing to take risks, because we're close to an edge. We need to not be afraid of being risky about getting across to people—not in an aggressive way, but recognizing that being threatening in the sense that our practice is threatening to the ego and the way we've constructed ourselves. This issue is similarly like that, and that is part of the work.

If you're entering from your own heart into spaces of love, really recognizing how important it is that we find our way and begin to have these conversations—we are no longer in a place where we can afford not to have these conversations. Whatever the risk is, I think we need to take it.

That's wonderful. I couldn't agree more, Reverend. Thank you so much.

This brings us to the point of wrapping up our conversation today. I'd like to again thank everyone for your contribution—both our wonderful teachers and the team that enabled this conference, and each and every one of you as participants.

The conversation will continue with our presenters next week: Jamie Baraz, Catherine McGee, and Chris Cullen, each doing wonderful and profound work. Please join us next Sunday at the same time. I've already mentioned and will continue to mention that we'll be moving towards developing a course to launch next year on the platform from One Earth Sangha.

I'd also like to encourage you to check out the dana page on One Earth Sangha. You can go to oneearthsangha.org and choose "support our work" to make a contribution to help us maintain and continue this conversation, continue this work, and continue to grow One Earth Sangha.

I'd also like to invite Barry from our host, Maestro Conference, who's been doing wonderful work to really help this happen. Barry, could you say a little about Maestro as a platform for other organizations if they wish to use it or other conference calls?

"Sure, thanks Tanissara. Maestro Conference is an amazing engagement tool, as you got to experience today, with breakouts and polling. It makes for very robust engagement. If any of you would like to know more about Maestro Conference, you can press one on your keypads. Maestro Conference will send you a gentle email with information about the features and benefits. They also have a free trial if you're interested. Simply press 1 now on your keypad if you're interested and we'll get that information to you. Thank you, Tanissara. Back to you."

Thank you so much. I think just again to take a deep breath and really absorb everything that we've been with this hour and a half together. I'd like to help us with that by inviting Ariya and Nandabodhi to share the blessings in a prayerful way as we finish our call today.

Let's just take a moment to connect with this body, with our bodies sitting on the earth beneath us and the space above and around us. Feel the interconnection with everyone else here who's called in today and with all living beings on this planet Earth.

Just taking in the beauty of this Earth, the preciousness, the connection and relationship that we have with each other. Let that touch and fill our hearts. Recognize our incredible good fortune in coming across the Dharma in our lives, having a chance to practice.

Reconnecting with the heart, feeling the punya—the goodness, the good energy that comes through our awakening, our wholesome intentions, the actions that we do in the world for the benefit of others, for the benefit of all beings.

I'd like to invite you to share in all directions the good energy, the good intentions, for the benefit of all beings: those who are friendly, those who are indifferent, those who are hostile, those who are helping, those who are harming. May all receive the blessings of our practice, that they may realize the true nature of benefit in this world.

Thank you so much. Thank you again to everyone. I look forward to connecting with you next Sunday and to remind you that we have the Facebook group to continue the discussion. Thank you so much. Goodbye.

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