Mindfulness and Climate Action: 3

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:08:47

A very warm welcome to everyone. Welcome back to those who are following these calls and welcome to all of you who are joining us for the first time today. Just to let you know that we've had over 2,200 people sign up for this series and about 15 to 30% of you are on the calls. Some are calling in as a group and people are calling in from the US, from Canada, from the EU, New Zealand, Italy, Finland, Ireland, UK, India, South Africa, so it's a wonderful representation of us as a global community.

My name is Tanitha and I'm the host and moderator for our conversation Mindfulness, Dharma and Climate Action. It is our hope that these conversations here will encourage each of you to engage conversations on climate change in your own communities. But before we begin, I would like to also encourage your support for this series and for the ongoing work of Dharma and Climate Action through making a dana contribution. This will help us to continue our work and for that we need your support. You can do this through going on the One Earth Sangha website, going to support our work in the menu and finding the dana button. Thank you so much.

We are in increasingly precarious times in regard to 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 ourselves, we will jeopardize a sustainable world for future generations.

Today, to explore this issue, I welcome our three teachers and speakers. Catherine McGee from Devon in the UK is a teacher at Gaia House and a student of the Diamond Heart approach. She emphasizes embodiment and working with whatever hinders us from living our deepest knowing in the world through body, speech and mind in her teachings. Chris Cullen is a Dharma teacher and psychotherapist from the UK. Chris co-founded the UK-based Mindfulness in Schools project and is on the teaching team at the Oxford University Mindfulness Centre. Chris also teaches at Gaia House in the UK and offers mindfulness courses for members of Parliament and peers in the Houses of Parliament London. James Barras from Berkeley, California, is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Centre. James has also initiated the very successful Community Dharma Leader Program and has been teaching the popular online course, Awakening Joy.

I also welcome our team, Barry Bettman from our host, Maestro Conference, Kristen Barker, co-founder of One Earth Sangha and White Awake, Yong Oh, teacher at Chattanooga Insight and Center for Mindful Living, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Lou Leonard, co-founder of One Earth Sangha and leader of Climate Change Program at World Wildlife Fund and our science advisor for our series.

So before I hand you over to Lou, again, I welcome you and just invite you to take a deep breath, to really

feel the breath in your body and then as you breathe out to relax into your body and to feel the sensation of sitting in your seat and on the earth, connecting with that sensation. And taking a deeper breath again, breathing in and feeling the air in our body, breathing out, relaxing and arriving into our presence, into our hearts, and into our bodies. Thank you.

Lou, please, if I can invite you to say a few words, then hand it over to our first teacher, Catherine.

Thank you, Tanisra, and hello, everyone. It's wonderful to be with you again today. I wanted to remind you all of the background paper that Priti Kenko and I have put together for the course. We've sent you all a link to it in emails, and if you'd like to access it directly from the website, you can do that at the One Earth Sangha website on the archive page where each of these talks are placed after we finish.

Also wanted to remind folks that if you have some questions that you would like to bring into the discussion, feel free to email those to questions at oneearthsangha.org. And again, as a reminder, we're recording this and the recording will be archived in the next day or so for those who aren't able to join in person or if you'd like to listen to it again.

So today we're going to, among other things, begin to explore a little bit of moving into action on climate change. The science research shows us that this can be one of the big obstacles for some as they begin to move into this space because climate change can feel so big and so impossible for individuals to have an impact on. And sometimes it even feels like no action is happening and certainly not enough. So I just want you to know that working on this every day, I feel those things too often in my own heart.

But I can tell you that there is a lot going on right now, activity-wise, on climate change. Just on Friday, as a sort of up-to-the-minute update, world governments agreed to take the last steps to set up the new Green Climate Fund, which will help support vulnerable communities and countries as they prepare for climate change. I expect to see a down payment of at least $10 billion U.S. dollars pledged next month to open up that Green Climate Fund and even see a pledge by the United States, which would be impressive.

But it's not just government action that matters. Individual action really matters a lot. We need to look no further than the People's Climate March from last month to show what kind of an impact we can have as individuals. And in the background paper, I just wanted to point out on pages five and six, you can see some examples of ways that you can get involved individually, and there's also a resource section at the end of the paper with more ideas.

And then, of course, what you're doing right now is actually one of the most important things you can do because helping to understand how our emotions and our hearts are affected by climate change is so critical to staying resilient and to help others do the same in the face of this crisis. Thank you for taking this action, this important brave step, and for your willingness to do more.

So I'm really grateful to be able to hand you over to Catherine McGee, who's really one of the biggest and wisest hearts exploring the space of the Dharma and climate change. Catherine, thank you for being with

us.

Thank you. I'm just pausing to land and feel my legs, feel my heart and the excitable sensation that's arising in my arms as I come to share and explore with you all. I'd like to bring to the conversation a question that I've been pondering that is helping me go deeper with the question of how to come into action. And the question goes something like this: What is the meeting place of the silence of the sage and the passion of the activist?

Where do they meet? And where do they meet in me? My love for the silent depth that we're invited into in our practice, where we can know what it's like to not be blown around by what arises internally and externally. And how to hold that with my love of conditions, my love of life, my love of what can arise internally and externally.

The other way I'm holding these questions is how to hold the timeless refuge of the Dhamma—being invited into that timeless knowing—with a very real urgency in time.

When we come into action, whatever action we take, we know from the Eightfold Path and from our direct experience that action always comes from intention. And our intention always comes from our view—right view, wise view, or unwise view, as the case may be. That right view heads up the Eightfold Path.

One way I like to understand right view was taught to me by one of my teachers: you are, I am, right now, here and now in this place, an open system. You're not a closed system, you're an open system. Everything we do affects everything else. There is no sealed unit, no fixed entity that we can retreat into or push our way forward with. We are an open system.

Another way of seeing this is that we sit at the interface of inner conditions—our inner responses moment to moment to the world within us and around us. We sit at this interface of inner and outer, how the outer world meets the inner. This is the meeting place. This is the meeting place that I want to reflect on and look into more deeply right now, because that's where we always are.

Right now as I speak, if I take a breath, that's where I am. There are inner conditions arising. There's still some kind of excitement and nervousness and tenderness in my heart, meeting the knowledge that I'm sitting here with many people. I can't see them, but I'm sitting here with many Dharma friends who want to listen and look into these questions. As I say that, my heart softens. Some of the nervousness relaxes. This is where we always are, at this interface.

Can we learn how to rest at that interface? Because that's sacred. That is whole. It has a wholeness to it where I'm not fragmenting or pushing away parts of myself or parts of the world in order to stay comfortable or okay.

It's not always easy to be an open system. There's so much that can be coming up for us sometimes and so

much coming toward us. So we have our practice for stabilizing and grounding, to not be blown around. But it's not easy. We're not a fixed entity, this open system. It's sensitive, it's responsive, it's easily impacted, and we deeply feel.

In whatever actions we come to take in our response to the climate crisis, for this to be truly sustaining and truly nourishing, we are invited to cultivate this deep intimacy with ourselves—because that's where we are—so that whatever action we take, we don't leave ourselves behind.

Let me take us into an example. A couple of weeks ago, I had the good fortune to speak on Skype with one of my Dharma teachers to discuss what we were doing in this mindfulness and climate work together. He's an older, wise, old tree of a man who has handled a lot internally and externally. I know he cares deeply about the planet, her beings, and this crisis that we're in together.

As we sat and breathed together, considering this topic, I brought to the table some of the information from Lou's sheets—the science information that he gave us. I brought it into the meeting and said, "Can I offer this?" He said, "Yes." I said, "We now know that to stay within two degrees Celsius of warming—to have a fair chance of staying within that, which will help us avoid more catastrophic runaway climate change—we can only burn 565 more gigatons of fuel to make that much CO2 in the atmosphere."

He paused and considered. I continued, "And the fossil fuel companies currently have 2,790 potentially burnable gigatons in reserves, in the knowable traditional reserves."

We breathed. I looked at him and saw his face. I thought, oh my goodness, I've delivered some bad news. I said, "How are you doing? How is that, to hear that?"

He said, "Catherine, that is truly bone jangling. That is truly bone jangling."

His bones were jangled. As I watched him, it looked as though a wind had just blown right through him. "Stirring stuff," he said. "This is stirring stuff indeed."

So how do we take that stirring stuff into our practice so that we can hold it within the sacred matrix and restore ourselves into the sacred matrix? Because as we handle what arises—and as I was with him I could feel my impatience and my sorrow and my pain—as I learned to handle that, my silence, my love of the silence helps me not be blown away by all that's arising.

And the passion, the bone jangling, the fire that also arises can help me be alive. That energy, when together with silence, can serve to light up and illuminate more truth, more ways to see the situation, more ways to understand skillful actions. This is the meeting place for me—this silence, this grounded, imperturbable silence, and that which is willing to be perturbed, willing to be altered by this information, willing to be woken up further into the sacred matrix of life.

I'm thinking of the bright lights of our history and the bright lights that are shining in all of you as we come into this together. I'm thinking of those beings who really exemplify this spiritual depth and this

bright, alive passion for justice. An easy one my mind goes to is Nelson Mandela, who had that spiritual depth to hold complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, discomfort, dis-ease. He could hold that, and yet that bright aliveness illuminated the territory for us. It's like a bright light in the world.

Having been with my teacher, I stood at my back door and I took this into my practice. As I handled my material—yes, there was my material, my stirred stuff—but also then my opening into more ease, less tightness. And then the thought arose: "But if I'm not tight, maybe I wouldn't act," as if trusting action would only come from tightening up.

I breathed and I softened. As I stayed close, this heart-mind, this chitta, this meeting place got wider and wider. I sensed, as all those little knots and pains unfolded, the energy didn't dissipate. I saw that this heart-mind was teeming with life—teeming with life that sometimes is encapsulated and hurting and in bondage, but also so much more than that. As I listened, I sensed this teeming life and I got the potentiality of us, this meeting place in coming into action.

This is sacred. This is the same nature, this heart-mind that I see out there. It's ever-receptive, restoring itself constantly and keeps revealing itself more and more the more I dare to live and breathe as an open system. This is where I want to meet you, and this is where, when I remember, this is where I meet myself. And I think as a sangha, this is where we can support each other in meeting each other. That our actions come from that—what flows out from that will be a reflection of that inner orientation.

So as urgent as our awakening is to a responsible and cooperative relationship with each other and the biosphere for the continuing of life, it's also essential if we are to remain human and let our human nature unfold its riches. So that's where I want to leave you as we move to Chris and move into action. Thank you so much.

"Thank you for your words, Catherine, so very beautiful and moving. I can feel them landing and the heart being opened and body softening into this incredible interface that we hold and can be with in such a sacred way. Chris, I'd like to welcome you. Chris is a very dear friend and I'm so grateful you can join us on the call. Please welcome you to share your considerations for us this morning."

"Thank you, Tanissara. And hello, everyone. It's really moving and inspiring to connect and be with you all in this conversation. I'd invite you and invite myself just again to reconnect with our contact with the ground, with the earth, with the body, with the breath, because it does seem as if reconnecting is what this is about.

The climate crisis has arisen as a result of us humans becoming tragically disconnected from ourselves and from each other and from the earth. As I'm becoming more mindful of my own patterns of connecting and disconnecting in relation to the climate crisis, I'm really appreciating the wisdom that's set out in a book called *Active Hope* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnston. Many of you may know this or have read it. In a very clear and compassionate and inspiring way, they highlight the perennial spiral of four processes

that are involved in the work of reconnecting."

And so I'd like to offer a few reflections on these themes.

The first is coming from gratitude. As we know from the story of the Buddha's awakening, his first practice after enlightenment was gazing at the Bodhi tree in gratitude and appreciation. What a profoundly resourcing, healing, and reconnecting practice this is—learning how to open our awareness and senses to receive with gratitude the presence, the gift of a tree, of a forest, of a city park, of a garden, even of a plant in our homes.

Of course, First Nation and indigenous peoples across the globe have always known this is not a luxury. Practices of thanksgiving and deep communion with nature are essential to bringing us back into right relationship with the larger life of which we're part. They build reverence. They bring healing. They open us to joy and to love.

Whether we're feeling numb and disconnected in relation to climate change, or on fire and in flow as activists, or burnt out in despair and fatigue, there's deep value in making a regular practice of mindful, grateful being in nature—centralizing thanksgiving in our lives as a key part of our response to climate change. Thanksgiving and gratitude support and nourish the heart. They remind us of our deep belonging, and they help develop our capacity to honor our pain for the world.

This brings us to the second theme in the spiral: opening to the personal and collective pain that we hold for what human beings have done and are doing to the biosphere. We can reflect on what relationship with this pain is showing up in our experience right now.

As we do this, we notice we have different relationships at different times. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by anger, fear, or despair and need to practice reconnecting with a sense of resource that can support me—that can support us—in holding pain with mindfulness and compassion. I really appreciated Tara's words in the first of these conversations about dropping the storyline of the bad other and allowing, connecting, breathing with the raw energy that has within it the care and compassion that our hearts are born for.

I notice that my tendency is often to be in a state of disconnection where the daily demands of personal, work, and family life can keep me somewhat out of contact with the urgency of the climate crisis and with the searing social, racial, and ecological injustice and suffering taking place in frontline communities. This, I know, is the disconnection of privileged distance, because the place where I live happens not to have been badly affected by climate change so far.

There's a particular moral imperative for those of us in this position to lean in and educate ourselves by reading, watching, and learning. I appreciated Catherine's words about the importance of making this self-education a practice—to watch and read and learn and discover more about climate change and the suffering involved in it as a meditation, as conscious heart work. To really practice opening to this stirring

material, because this is precisely the work we as human beings most need to practice: coming consciously into contact with the truth of climate change and its suffering, and allowing ourselves to be affected.

We need to learn the skills of this and pass them on to others. Research in the UK suggests that almost 80% of people accept the science of climate change, but only 14% act accordingly. There's talk about the need to move the unmoved—those who know the facts but are apparently not affected by them. It's been inspiring and challenging that some scientists have recently been acknowledging the role of spiritual tradition in doing this work. Perhaps there's an important role for the mindfulness movement as it spreads into wider society to play a part in this.

So we develop our capacity, learn how to resource ourselves, to turn toward and honor our pain—our individual and collective pain for the world. This opens us into the possibility of seeing with new eyes, a transformation of view. In the book, Joanna and Chris write about developing a wider sense of self, a different kind of power, a richer experience of community, and a larger view of time. I won't speak about each of these now, but I really encourage you to read this book and familiarize yourself with this material.

This practice of seeing with new eyes is really what we're doing when we practice mindfulness, when we practice dharma. There's this sense of dharma and mindfulness practice as consciously practicing ways of looking that lead our hearts toward greater freedom, connection, and compassion. There's subtle but significant contemplative work to do in becoming mindful of the ways of looking that disconnect us, that support the creation of self and other, whether in relation to other people or to the earth itself.

We can practice ways of looking that honor and open the deeper truths of our connection and interdependence. We can give time to this in our meditation practice—practicing widening our metta, our hearts, to include all creatures and the earth itself. Practicing holding the current climate emergency in a sense of vast time and noticing how this affects us. Practicing releasing the clinging to outcomes as we respond to climate change and trusting and feeling into the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself, as Thomas Merton puts it.

This is a transformation of view that reconnects us and develops our capacity to respond to suffering in the world with greater wisdom and compassion. This brings us to the fourth of these perennial themes: going forth, reconnecting contemplative work with action in the world. James will say more about this in a moment.

But as Catherine has been reflecting, contemplation and activism need and support each other. Climate change is a challenge to bring them into conscious relationship, into what Andrew Harvey calls sacred activism—the activism of the bodhisattva path. As the saying goes, action absorbs anxiety. It builds confidence and connection. And wise action coming from love is contagious.

And so now, as we're having these conversations, perhaps this is a good time for each of us to review and

reflect. What are my specific intentions in response to climate change? Are there particular connections or pledges that I feel called or inspired to make? Are there ways in which I could reduce the carbon footprint of the building I call home—perhaps by looking at better insulation, or even just small daily acts? As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says in his autobiography, just because switching off the lights when leaving a room seems inconsequential, it doesn't mean we shouldn't do it.

I've been reviewing my transport patterns, mindful of the fact that these are a huge source of CO2 emissions, especially flying. Are there ways in which we could make different choices about travel, both locally and further afield? What about our diet—what I eat and where it comes from—and our other patterns of consumption? The Buddha presented compassionate renunciation, voluntary simplicity in the service of compassion, as a path to joy and an expression of love.

As Tanissara said at the start of today's conversation, having courageous conversations—talking with people in our homes, our communities, our sanghas, our workplaces—these are one of the main ways in which we can help bring this conversation into wider society and not collude with the taboo of keeping quiet about climate change. And there is a growing wisdom about how to do this in ways that engage and connect rather than alienate. I appreciate the work of George Marshall and the Climate Outreach Information Network here in Oxford in the UK on this.

What the science seems to be suggesting, and both Lou and Catherine have referred to this, is that the biggest leverage we can have in helping to prevent runaway climate change is in helping to build political momentum locally, nationally and internationally to help keep fossil fuels in the ground. This points to the importance of encouraging our councils, our churches, our universities, our arts organizations and governments to divest and change their relationship with the fossil fuel industries, seeking to replace fossil fuels with more sustainable sources of power.

This is not about creating more us-and-them thinking. All of us in developed economies are involved in consuming fossil fuel products. But what this is pointing to is the sense that this is a systemic problem that we all need to take action on to help move us to more sustainable ways of living.

And so as we contemplate the dharma of climate change, as we absorb what it's teaching us, as we seek to respond with wisdom and compassion to its challenge, as we hear its call to reconnect with ourselves, each other, and with the earth, perhaps this perennial spiral of four themes can hold and illuminate the contemplative and active work in which we're engaged: coming from gratitude, honoring our pain for the world, seeing with new eyes in ways that transform our view, and going forth into action together, knowing that we do so in sangha and in solidarity with each other and with this beloved, precious earth.

James then joined the conversation, bringing his perspective on the crucial importance of holding an inspiring vision. "For me, if my inspiration is not there, then I feel discouraged and defeated," he shared. He spoke about seeing dharma practice as a way to acknowledge suffering and transform it through wisdom and love as a vehicle for awakening.

James recounted his own journey: "I've been teaching about happiness for some time and was enjoying seeing dharma as a path of happiness for many years. But then I was stopped dead in my tracks when I read Bill McKibben's book *Earth* about four years ago. I was well aware of climate change, but that was the first time that I really let it sink in. And it shook me, as everyone is shaken when they take in this information. It was hard for me to talk about joy for a while."

He described a necessary period of absorption: "I really had to let it absorb for about a year, a year and a half, to just feel all the pain and wonder, 'What can I do? What can we do?' And then I realized that this is my dharma practice. How can I take this on as my practice and not be overwhelmed with it?"

Drawing on the Buddha's teaching, James reminded us: "In one of the discourses, the Buddha says, 'Whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that becomes the inclination of their mind.' As I was frequently thinking and pondering upon how there's no hope and we're doomed, it became more and more a discouraging way to hold this. I realized I need to hold an inspiring vision and to find my inspiration wherever I can, because otherwise we're subject to what neuroscientists talk about as confirmation bias—everything we see will confirm our belief. As I found my own inspiration, I found that I had more energy for addressing this problem, both intrapersonally and outwardly."

Bhikkhu Bodhi's beautiful essay, "A Challenge to Buddhists," where he says: "The special challenge facing Buddhism in our age is to stand up as an advocate for justice in the world, a voice of conscience. This, in my view, is a deeply moral challenge marking a watershed in the modern expression of Buddhism."

This felt like a calling—oh, this is what we're meant to do, and I want to be part of that.

I also found inspiration in Andrew Harvey's beautiful book "The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism." He talks about this dilemma we're all facing, that the world is facing, as a dark night of the species. Just as our own Dharma practice requires us—anyone who's done deep work knows—to often pass through a dark night of the soul, as it's sometimes called in Christian terms, where we face our deepest fears and somehow transform them, emerging on the other side into a great awakening.

If we can see that the world is going through this dark night of the species, then we recognize this as a tremendous opportunity. We are living in an unsustainable way, and something needs to change. As one friend puts it, we are in a race between fear and consciousness.

I loved what Lou said on our first call: that things are getting worse and worse and better and better and faster and faster. That perfectly articulates this challenge we're in. Going through this together represents an opportunity for a great awakening.

When I reflect on this, I also think about Arnold Toynbee's statement. The great historian said that looking back, he thought perhaps the most important development in the 20th century would be Buddhism coming to the West. That's amazing foresight, and it's possibly true—whether you call it Buddhism or the Dharma or consciousness—this seeing ourselves in the bigger picture of interconnectedness,

understanding actions and consequences, understanding the possibility of a worldwide deepening of consciousness and caring. This is what we have to offer.

When I think about it in that way, it becomes exciting: we are conveyors of that attitude and principle. It's up to us to hold something in a positive, possible light.

Another person who has inspired me is Bob Oppelt, who works with the Obama administration and is a longtime Dharma practitioner. We had him speak to the International Vipassana Teachers Conference, and he was a key mentor in helping us create the Dharma Teachers' Climate Change Statement. At one point I said to him, "Bob, it's so wonderful that your Dharma practice and your sustainability work have come together. How synchronous, how fortuitous."

He looked at me and said, "James, the Dharma holds the key to this."

I realized: here's one of the leading sustainability experts saying the Dharma holds the key. What can we do to more and more articulate these teachings and have a voice for consciousness?

This encourages me, as does seeing how quickly things can change. We have no idea what's possible. I don't want to be naive and say everything's going to work out just fine—it's quite possible there isn't time to change direction enough to avoid deep suffering. But we don't know, and things change so quickly.

Think about same-sex marriage in the last ten years, how conventional wisdom has shifted. Or even climate change in the last decade, even the last two years. I recently saw that two Senate candidates who were climate deniers have now changed their platforms, realizing that position won't get them elected. That kind of shift in conventional wisdom changes who's in power, and once people see it's no longer acceptable to deny climate reality, things can change very quickly.

Or consider the divestment movement Chris mentioned—the Rockefellers and Stanford being part of this huge divestment wave. I've read that just a seven to ten percent shift in population thinking is what's needed to shift conventional wisdom generally. You don't have to change everybody—just work with those who are open to change. Most people, once they hear "this is how I'm supposed to think," will go along with that.

And as Catherine mentioned, Mandela talks about the multiplication of courage. When people gather together, they feed off each other's commitment. The whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts—when people unite, amazing things can happen.

When we come from love and connect with each other, we experience that multiplication of courage. Neuroscience shows that when you hold someone's hand, you have a higher threshold for pain. Amazing things become possible.

As Chris said, action absorbs anxiety. I think it's important for us to get clear on our next steps, because remarkable things can happen when we hold hands and join together in possibility. We inspire others and

become agents of inspiration.

With that, I want to lead us in a reflection in a few moments, where we can hold that inspiring vision and see what our next steps might be.

I'll stop here to allow us to transform what can feel like overwhelm into recognizing the power and opportunity in this moment—the urgency, the power, and the possibility of moving together into action and response. I'll be guiding us into a reflective inquiry that we'll explore in our small breakout groups.

Thank you, Kirk. What I'm hearing is a deep concern about those forces and influences that seem to operate without the kind of consciousness or care that our planet desperately needs right now. And I think this touches on something really important - how do we as practitioners work with what feels like destructive elements that seem overwhelming in their scope and intent?

One of the things I've found helpful is to remember that even when we encounter what appears to be unconscious or harmful behavior, we're still working within the realm of human consciousness. And consciousness, by its very nature, has the capacity to wake up. Sometimes what looks like sociopathic behavior is actually deep suffering that has become so defended and armored that it can't feel the interconnection that we all share.

This doesn't mean we become naive or passive in the face of destructive forces. Rather, it invites us to bring both wisdom and compassion to our response. We can work to create systems and structures that don't reward harmful behavior, while also holding the possibility that even the most defended hearts can open.

I think James touched on this earlier when he spoke about the importance of not getting lost in overwhelm, but rather channeling our energy into skillful action. When we encounter these seemingly unconscious forces, our dharma practice invites us to respond from a place of clarity rather than reactivity - to meet unconsciousness with consciousness.

Barry or James, what comes up for you in response to Kirk's concern?

One was this idea of kind of a personal practice that would be helpful is around impermanence and death, and having some kind of regular contemplation around the fact that we're going to die, our earth is going to die, that nothing's permanent, and that that reflection kind of helps us cut through a lot of the stuff that we get into a lot of difficulty with, a lot of the desires and cravings that we get into that cause a lot of environmental damage.

And the other thing that came up for me was when I heard James talking about conventional wisdom, it reminded me of this quote from Gandhi about first they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win. And it feels like in many ways we're at that fighting stage right now where the powers that be are really pushing back against environmental awareness and climate action.

So I wonder if the teachers have any reflections on how we can skillfully engage when we're in that fighting stage, and also about this practice of impermanence as it relates to environmental action.

That's a beautiful question, John. Thank you. Let me offer a reflection on both of those elements you've raised.

On the contemplation of impermanence and death—this is indeed a profound practice that can radically shift our relationship to consumption and environmental harm. When we truly internalize the reality that this body will die, that this earth as we know it will transform, that all the things we cling to are temporary, it naturally creates a letting go. It helps us see through the illusion that accumulating more will somehow give us lasting security or happiness.

This contemplation isn't morbid—it's liberating. When we're not desperately trying to hold onto what's already slipping away, we can engage more freely and compassionately with what's actually here. We can make choices based on love rather than fear, on wisdom rather than craving.

Regarding the fighting stage that Gandhi described—yes, there's definitely a sense that we're in that phase where there's tremendous pushback against environmental consciousness. The question of how to engage skillfully when there's such resistance is crucial.

I think this is where the Middle Way becomes essential. We need the fierce compassion of a protector—someone willing to stand up for what's precious and vulnerable. But we also need to maintain our inner equilibrium so we don't get caught in reactivity that actually undermines our effectiveness.

This means practicing with our own anger and fear, using them as fuel for wise action rather than letting them burn us out or turn us into the very forces we're trying to counter. It means finding ways to stay connected to joy and beauty even while facing difficult truths about environmental destruction.

Thank you, John, for that wonderful reflection.

The one thing that gives me some sense of confidence—and I think Chris and James both addressed this, as has Tanissara—is knowing that my individual actions are not mine alone. My neighbors, people in my building, people in my sangha, people elsewhere are all doing the same thing, and those things all do have an impact.

That said, and I guess I'd mostly want to hear from Chris on this: it seems to me that if somehow our actions could reach and make one tectonic shift—reaching a Koch brother or the head of ExxonMobil or whoever—these people may be deluded, but they're not unintelligent. They know full well what the impacts of their actions are. If somehow a shift can be made on that level, then one of those shifts would have a massive impact throughout.

What we can do to make that happen is what's frustrating, because it's not easy to reach people like that. While James was talking about that 10% shift in the population, there's still this frustration of seeing the

destruction these companies are doing and recognizing that if they would only shift, everything else would shift.

That's a really great question. Chris, we don't have a lot of time, but I'm wondering if you can reflect on what John is proposing.

I really appreciate what you're saying, John. It seems to me that these big institutions are also vulnerable. They're vulnerable to what people—they depend on us as consumers and on what we think of them. What we need is a growing mobilization of public opinion that starts to regard these big companies the way we've come to regard tobacco companies, where we see them very differently now from twenty years ago. If we can, through our conversations and our work, help each of us shift attitudes, then this is how we can engage and influence these big, seemingly impregnable organizations.

That's fantastic. Thank you so much. We're going to begin our wrap-up now.

Thank you, Krista, and thank you to our teachers. Just take a breath, because it's just so full and so rich, this conversation, and I'm so grateful. We're also grateful for all of you participating because we know that it represents others who are not actually online but will hear the conversation and are engaged.

Much gratitude to everyone. Before we finish, I'd like to mention that we do have the Facebook group that you can access through One Earth Sangha to continue the discussion. And Barry, if you would give us a minute about Maestro, which is our host for these conversations.

I'm the call driver for today. Maestro Conference provides leading industry teleconference features like being able to let people raise their hands and create breakout groups. If you would like information about Maestro Conference, simply press 1 on your telephone keypad. Maestro will send you information about the features and benefits of their service, including a free trial.

Thank you so much. I'd like to invite you all back to our fourth conversation, which will be next Sunday at the same time, when we host Chas DiCapua, Bonnie Duran, and Vinnie Ferraro. We'll continue on Facebook as well.

Catherine, please, can I invite you to finish us today with a sharing of blessings?

What a privilege to share the blessing here. I'm really letting myself feel it right now. If you will breathe, sense your feet on the ground. Take a breath through the heart-mind, this sensitivity, this intelligent, receptive, ever-regenerative quality.

In gratitude—really in gratitude for you all and all that you bring to the table here: your practice, your love of truth, your love of justice. To all the people who have been involved in setting this up, and all the different qualities you bring—we're all so different and with such different gifts and qualities that we bring to the table—in gratitude and in blessing.

May this blessing of being in sangha, of the awake and timeless refuge, be for the welfare of the many, for all beings: to the north, to the west, to the east, to the south, above and below, without exception—those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly, those that breathe, those that are human, all of us, wherever we are right now. May all beings receive the blessings of our good intention and our continuing work together. May all beings be free from suffering.

Thank you so much. It's beautiful. Again, thank you to everyone. Goodbye for now, and see you and listen to you and share together next Sunday.

And may this blessing of being in Sangha, of the awake and timeless refuge, may this be for the welfare of the many, for all beings—to the north, to the west, to the east, to the south, above and below, without exception. Those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly, those that breathe, those that are human—all of us, wherever we are right now.

May all beings receive the blessings of our good intention and our continuing work together. May all beings be free from suffering.

Thank you so much. It's beautiful.

And again, thank you to everyone. Goodbye for now, and see you and listen to you and share together next Sunday.

Thank you for listening.

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