Mindfulness and Climate Action: Part 4

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:05:36

Welcome to everyone to our call today. Welcome back and welcome to those joining us for the first time. My name is Tanisara and I am the host for our conversation, Mindfulness, Dharma and Climate Action.

I'd like to warmly welcome our teachers. First, Bonnie Duran is a Dharma teacher at Seattle Insight Meditation Society and helped to establish the People of Color and Ally Sanghas in Seattle and Albuquerque. Bonnie is involved in Native American spiritual practices, is an associate professor in the Schools of Social Work and Public Health at UW, and director of the Center for Indigenous Health Research. So a very heartfelt warm welcome to Bonnie.

Also joining us is Chas DiCaprio, who is resident teacher at Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. Chas trained in meditation, primarily in the Theravada school with Burmese masters and senior Vipassana teachers and monastics from the Thai forest tradition. Chas is interested in how the basic material of our everyday lives, including relationships, can be used as a vehicle for awakening.

And a very warm welcome to Vinnie Ferreira. Vinnie has studied with several renowned spiritual teachers, including Ajahn Sumedho and the Dalai Lama, as well as spending a year at San Francisco Zen Center Hospice Program sitting with the dying. Vinnie has taught meditation to incarcerated youth and adults and is currently head trainer of the Mind-Body Awareness Project. He also teaches at the Urban Dharma Center in San Francisco.

I'm so grateful that our teachers can join us today for our conversation. I also welcome back our team: Kristen Barker from One Earth Sangha, Yong Oh from Chattanooga Insight, and Barry Bettman from Maestro Conference.

Before we begin, I'd like to encourage the offering of dana—making a contribution to help support the cost of running this program and to further the work of One Earth Sangha. If you'd like to do that, please go to the One Earth Sangha website and make a contribution, which we so deeply appreciate.

Let's take a breath together and really feel ourselves in our bodies as we breathe deeply. Arriving into our presence, into our hearts, and into our seats here, feeling the sensation of sitting, connecting with that sensation, with the ground, with the earth elements, and with the feeling of the breath in the body.

This week, Lou, the co-founder of One Earth Sangha and science advisor for our conversation, is on retreat. So I'd like to address a question asked by several of you regarding advocating a plant-based diet.

There are several dimensions to this question. First, land use for animal agriculture is one of the leading

causes of greenhouse gases heating our planet. Livestock production occupies about 30% of the land surface of the Earth and accounts for 18% of CO2, 37% of methane gases—which are 20 times more potent than CO2—and 65% of nitrous oxide, which is 300 times more potent than CO2. Altogether, 7 billion humans raise 70 billion farm animals.

The single largest contributor to environmental ills is caused by modern factory farming and animal agricultural processes, which lead to deforestation—for example, an acre of rainforest is decimated every second. This leads to water scarcity—it takes 600 gallons of water to produce one hamburger. It leads to destabilization of communities that are cleared off the land to make way for agricultural farming practices, which creates hunger as grains go to animal feed rather than directly to humans. It leads to the decimation of wildlife, oceans, and the loss of species and biodiversity of plants and insects. It is also the leading cause of water pollution—in California alone, 70 million animals produce as much untreated manure as 456 million people.

On a humane and compassionate level, and in accordance with our first precept to refrain from taking life, it is an act of ethics and compassion to be aware of the horrific practices now involved in the production of meat and animal-based products. Truly, if there is a hell on earth, it is factory farming and the shipment of animals destined for the slaughterhouse, where tremendous suffering and trauma is released and processed ultimately into our bodies and atmosphere, increasing violence and disease.

As we awaken, we become acutely aware of our interconnection with all beings, which means we become more sensitive to the suffering and rights of others, including the animal kingdom, and our need to act accordingly. It is in this regard that it's important we consider reducing our reliance on animal-based products.

Today, I am deeply grateful to have our wonderful teachers with us, focusing on this theme of connection and interconnection. It's with great pleasure that I welcome Bonnie to speak with us first.

Thank you, Tanisara, and everyone who's on the call. Thank you so much for this invitation to speak today.

As a person who works in Indian country—meaning in indigenous communities—and as a Buddhist, I think both perspectives can understand the truth of climate change as a natural outcome of colonization. I want to explore that a little on this call.

One way to think about the three root poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion that the Buddha and other teachers discuss so eloquently is as a process of colonization. They colonize our hearts and minds. Greed manifests as unending craving for anything that will be permanent and provide us some sense of contentment and well-being. Hatred and delusion manifest as conceit, where we have thoughts that we're better than or worse than or the same as others, and the sense of self forever has us creating an identity for ourselves. And delusion, which in my understanding is the root of all of these, is us not understanding

our interconnectedness and experiencing ourselves as separate human beings.

And in my life, I have taken the Eightfold Path and mindfulness as the medicine for these afflictions. One of my colleagues in Indian country who teaches mindfulness, Dr. Michael Yellowbird, calls mindfulness "neurodecolonization."

Next week we'll have the benefit of listening to Dr. David Loy on this call. He has a wonderful conceptualization of the three root poisons on a grander scale—that the three root poisons colonize our economic system, our political and governance system, and our knowledge development system. And it's a dualistic error to think that we don't need to work on decolonizing these levels as well.

One way that delusion manifests in a larger context is not understanding that there are more than one way of knowing things. In Indian Country, we really do believe that going back to or including indigenous ecological knowledge is one way to think about a very important, cogent, and wisdom-informed approach to climate justice. Some ecological knowledge is very similar to Western linear conceptual science, but it's also very deeply rooted in what we understand to be intuitive awareness.

We all have two knowledge systems. We have a knowledge system of intuitive awareness that—the way I talk about it—mindfulness is the data gathering system for our knowledge system of intuitive awareness, seeing things very directly beyond concepts. And then, of course, we all have our Western linear conceptual way of looking at things, which is not inherently bad, it's just inherently limited.

Greed manifests in our larger social context through our economic system that promotes unchecked accumulation as an antidote to our suffering. I'm sure none of us have ever acquired anything that gave us a sense of contentment beyond never wanting anything again. In the larger social context, hatred manifests in our polarized political system where people just can't seem to get things done, at least in the United States right now. And hatred manifests in our war industrial complex as it applies to other countries and other people.

But in my view, the Buddha Dharma is the medicine for this suffering. Mindfulness is a form of neurodecolonization. We know that when we practice, we are uprooting our intentions for greedy intentions, our aversive intentions, and our deluded intentions, and trying to replace them with the truth of how things are. It really uproots our vipallasas.

I love this teaching of the Buddha—our distortions of perception, which arise as we understand ourselves as individual selves. Our distortions of thought that come from that, where we try to accumulate as much as we can in order to situate ourselves or to bring some level of satisfaction. And then a vipallasa or distortion of view—that deeply held belief that we have that we can exploit and consume without consequences to our environment.

For me, the Eightfold Path brings us into alignment with things as they really are. One of the deepest realizations that we all are opening to is how we're not separate people. And I think climate change has

absolutely proven that to be true. The Eightfold Path and mindfulness promotes our understanding of right view—that we are all interconnected and that we all are going to share the same fate.

I want to talk briefly about one manifestation of this indigenous, intuitive way of knowing. The presidents of Bolivia and Ecuador, both indigenous states, have actually changed their constitution to give rights to Pachamama or to give rights to nature. In Bolivia, the constitution now reads that nature has a right to live and to exist, to continual vital cycles and processes free from human alteration. Their constitution states that nature has the right to pure water and clean air and the right to balance and the right not to be polluted. And nature has the right to have cellular structure not modified by genetic altering. I think that's one manifestation of indigenous knowledge or intuitive awareness that humans are not at the center of the life cycle, but definitely a part of a larger approach.

I want to end my brief talk here with a quote from John Mohawk, who was one of our spiritual and political leaders. He died in 2006, but what he says here really speaks to us as beings that are deeply interconnected.

John Mohawk says, "The culture that I come from saw the universe as the fountain of everything including consciousness. In our culture, we're scolded for being so arrogant to think that we're smart. An individual is not smart according to our culture. An individual is merely lucky to be a part of a system that has intelligence that happens to reside in them. In other words, be humble about this always. The real intelligence isn't the property of an individual. The real intelligence is the property of the universe itself."

Drawing on this universal intelligence, we come to understand our deep interconnectedness and we come to understand how colonization and climate change as an outcome of that continues to disproportionately affect people in resource-poor countries and indigenous communities. Turning back to incorporating indigenous knowledge and intuitive awareness in the Eightfold Path gives us a way out of the hopefully not inevitable outcome of our unfettered use of resources and exploitation of nature.

I think that intuitive awareness is where we come to see the reality of impermanence, of things changing all the time. The reason why no conditioned experience will give us ultimate satisfaction is because things are always changing. Intuitive awareness is where we see the truth of dukkha, the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of any conditioned experience. And it's where we open to and have deep realization of our interconnected existence—not as separate beings, but as all part of an ecosystem that thrives and lives together or dies together. That too is intuitive awareness.

The Buddha said, go live in the forest as a way to open to truth. And indigenous communities have been stewards of the forest for millennia.

I really feel this movement of humility. We need to be more humble, to move out of this linear paradigm of Western knowledge and take a humble journey into the wisdom that First Nations peoples, indigenous peoples, have held about the earth and reality for millennia.

So Chas, I'd like to welcome you from Insight Meditation Society, a very venerable institution supporting the practice of mindfulness, awareness and meditation for many years. Thank you for being with us today. Would you share your thoughts on this pressing issue of entering our times of climate emergency from the place of the Dharma?

Yes, thank you, Tanisha. I must say I was taking notes frantically trying to capture all the good points Bonnie was making. I'm also seeing on my screen all the people from around the world on this call, and that itself is wonderful. Even if nothing else happens with this call, the fact that we're doing this is a huge step in the right direction.

Before I begin, I want to clarify two things. First, I'll be talking about technology, and it might seem negative, but I'm not saying technology is all negative. We're on this call because of technology. Second, I'll be speaking about masculine and feminine energies, which don't equate to male and female. They're energies within the human psyche—very powerful ones that Jung helped us understand. Much can be understood when we place that lens onto what's happening.

A few years ago, information came to me that the institution with the largest endowment in the world—the largest pile of resources that people have given to it—is Harvard University. When I heard that, I thought it makes sense, actually, because often money is energy, and we place our energy where we think it's important. So it would make sense that an institution about intellectual knowledge would receive so much energy from so many people.

This reflects the society we live in, really the world we live in as it becomes more homogenized. The intellect and technology and the esteem given to them—it's not just that they exist, which is fine—but the esteem they're given, almost the bowing down to them, gets out of hand. It gets out of balance.

Many of you may have seen the movie Koyaanisqatsi, that beautiful film with no words, just pictures. As many know, that Hopi word means "life out of balance." We can see this happening—the bowing down to technology or science. The food pyramid gets reconstructed, scientists say "eat this," and everyone in advertising runs in that direction. Then the food pyramid changes, they say "eat this," and everyone runs in that direction again. There's this sense of giving our power over to what is based in science and technology.

I even see this with the exploding research in mindfulness. They're hooking up the brain, and I wonder, why don't they hook up the heart? Why don't they put electrodes on the heart and study the heart?

So you can almost see that bias towards the brain or towards the intellect, even showing up in our arena, in our Dharma arena in terms of the research.

All this has a root. As Bonnie mentioned, the colonization absolutely plays a role. But I want to take that root even a step further back and talk about patriarchy—this dominant energy or paradigm in our world that's been going on for thousands and thousands of years.

In patriarchy, which tends to be masculine energy dominated, the intellect is held in high esteem. In the paradigm of patriarchy, the intellect is probably most valued. And then, of course, there needs to be a shadow side to that. So in the paradigm of patriarchy, the body or that which is feminine tends to be devalued.

I could spend the rest of the call talking about examples of this, but just one interesting example, especially in terms of spirituality: In many religions or in many spiritual places in the world, certainly in the past and still present some, women were not allowed in the temple during that time of the month when they were bleeding—body being seen as somehow dirty and devalued.

This is powerful, deep, insidious messaging that we all inherit, whether we know it or like it. It's just something that we inherit.

So in this paradigm of patriarchy, because that which is of the intellect and that which is masculine is dominant and revered, it's going to get a lot of energy, a lot of resources. Again, think of Harvard University. And then, in order to be that unbalanced, if something's going to be revered, something's going to have to be put down. The feminine energies are going to be put down. And those manifest in the body—often feminine energy associated with women, but again, as I mentioned, it's not exclusive—but also in the natural world.

So I want to talk about the ways that in this patriarchal paradigm, we have devalued and therefore disconnected from the body, from women, and from the natural environment. Of course, you can see the connection between those three.

Often when I teach meditation, I have to spend quite a lot of time working with students to really get folks connected to their bodies—not just the idea of their body, but really settled back into and having a very intimate connection with the body. Because of the patriarchal environment, we've really become disconnected from our body. We spend so much time in thought, so much time in the intellect. And during those times, the somatic experience of the body is completely lost. It's not present. And so we become disconnected from the body.

Then we come into this weird relationship with the body, this thing that we've gotten disconnected with. On one hand, we either spend too much time kind of paying attention to it, almost revering it too much—you can see that in hyper getting in shape and working out and how one looks, that end of the spectrum. And on the other end of the spectrum is just the abuse of the body and not taking care of it.

I want to point out a correlation with the natural world. One of the points I want to make here is the connection between how we relate to our own bodies and how we relate to the natural world. So again, with the natural world, we may have this view of "oh it's so beautiful, it's so wonderful," and we want to make parks and national parks, and there's a part of us that knows just how exquisite it is. And yet, as with the body, we also abuse it. We heavily abuse it. So as goes the body, as goes the natural world. What

we are disconnected from becomes much easier to harm.

If we are standing next to another human being and we are upset with them, it's much more difficult to be really mean to them than it is when we're in our car and someone cuts us off and there's space and steel and glass between them. The level of violence that can come out of us given that lack of connection—what we're not connected to becomes much easier to harm.

When I'm using body and nature as two different words, sometimes I like to say small body, big body. We become disconnected from body. And therefore, based on everything that Bonnie was talking about, based on what we know about greed, hatred, and delusion, those three defilements then run rampant based on that disconnection.

One of the reasons I said if nothing else happens with this call, it would be a good thing, is because part of addressing climate change is about us connecting, about us coming together. And just by being together in this call, on one level, we're in relationship.

But we have to start—all our dharma practice starts with ourselves. And then we take it into the wider world. So starting with ourselves and starting with connecting with our bodies is just so key.

In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha talks about mindfulness of body, which is the first foundation. And if you look at that sutta and the number of pages that it takes up, the section on the body takes up more space and the Buddha has more words to say about it than any of the other three foundations of mindfulness. So this connecting with the body, being mindful of it, is just totally essential. And it's a coming home that we really need to come back to.

If we can do that, or as we do that, it's a natural connection. It's not like we have to do anything. The more we are connected to body, the more we are connected to body—to small body, to big body.

That's beautiful. Chas, thank you so much. And thank you for bringing and weaving in from Bonnie her wisdom on this issue of the overarching connection with patriarchy and its impact so deeply for all of us—whatever gender or outside the gender binary—and bringing it back to a place where we can begin with our own bodies. Thank you so much.

Just taking a breath and receiving and drinking in those words from Chas that I personally feel very moved to hear and nourished by.

I'm also very glad that we have Vinny with us on our call today. Vinny is a very dear friend and practitioner who goes to the difficult places to practice and share the Dharma like a great Bodhisattva. So Vinny, thank you so much for being with us. We really welcome and appreciate you and invite you to share your thoughts.

Thank you so much. Thanks for the invitation and setting this whole thing up. It seems like a really necessary conversation, and so much has been offered already.

When I started thinking about this conversation and this theme of interdependence, I was brought back to the Buddha and what he talked about around spiritual friends—that they were the foundation of the spiritual path. He knew that our connection lies at the very core of the human psyche.

So what is this journey that Chas and Bonnie were both speaking about? This journey back to belonging, from this disembodiment to the truth of our interdependence. I experience it as slowly waking up out of a trance. How do we wake up to the truth that we're living in an interconnected field?

When we look at the response of the Earth to everything that's been happening, you could say it's a lawful response to the stress that we've put on this planet. But I want to bring it back down to a really personal level. How do we rest in this field of interconnectedness when ninety percent of our time is spent indoors? How can we love something that we're removed from or that we even ignore? This is this feeling of disembodiment—I'm not connected to me, so how can I be connected to you or anything else?

I like what Chas was saying about how the practice has been readying us for this conversation. We know how to do this. So how do we get back in touch with this belonging?

The first place I go personally in my practice is: how is this just some kind of funhouse of mirrors? How can I see this in myself, what Bonnie was talking about around greed, hatred, and delusion? How do I see these energies in me? How do I see myself as hooked on growth and progress—just one more workshop, just one more thing, and then I'll be okay? This need to improve and progress. How do we see that mirrored in the acceleration of culture, where everything needs to be better and faster and stronger?

It can be an overwhelming time for a lot of us, caught in our own survival beliefs that I'm not enough or I need more—this kind of addiction mentality. It's easy to be almost paralyzed into no response. I see that in myself. I know that I can get so busy setting up a good base camp that I never get around to climbing the mountain because I don't know where to begin. It all seems so big.

I know we all cherish this principle of non-harming, but how do we turn that into action? How do we move from belief to action? How do we discern the difference between the acceptance that we've been practicing and activism?

The words of E.B. White come to mind as he talks about: "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor it. This makes it hard to plan the day."

I think this is where I'd like to put our attention. Is there a place on this path for revolution? And was the Buddha really a revolutionary? What he laid out was really revolutionary at that time, for sure. Even 2,600 years later, it seems like it's a pretty revolutionary path, as we say, against the stream.

I want to read a little bit from a teacher that has taught many of us about reconnecting.

This makes it hard to plan the day. I think this is where I'd like to put our attention. Is there a place on this path for revolution? Was the Buddha really a revolutionary? What he laid out was truly revolutionary at

that time, and even 2,600 years later, it seems like a pretty revolutionary path—as we say, against the stream.

I want to read a paragraph from a teacher who has taught many of us about reconnecting—Joanna Macy. She writes:

"When we include the natural world in our identity, we're brought into a much larger story of who we are and what we are. Recognizing ourselves as part of the living body of the earth opens us to a greater source of strength. The expression 'at your age' takes on a different meaning when we see ourselves as part of an amazing flow of life that started on this planet more than 3.5 billion years ago. We come from an unbroken lineage that has survived through five mass extinctions. People fear that if they let despair in, they'll be paralyzed because they're just one person. Paradoxically, by allowing ourselves to feel our pain for the world, we open ourselves up to the web of life and realize that we're not alone."

Knowing that the voice we most need to hear comes from within us, I want to invite everybody to sit back for a few minutes and go inside. I'll guide it a little. This is what we've been practicing—how to go inside and listen. This willingness to turn toward and to stay present.

We begin by feeling the sincerity of our intention and sensing the flavor of caring. How do we stay in the conversation if it feels overwhelming and difficult and uncomfortable—in this cloud of unknowing, this place of no answers? We're really sitting in the questions and connecting to this deepest, wisest part of you.

Connecting down into the body of the earth like the Buddha plunging his hand into the earth, we allow our awareness to descend. We're literally made up of earth—we're sprouted earthlings. John Seed writes, "I try to remember that it's not me trying to protect the rainforest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am the part of the rainforest recently emerged into human thinking."

So we connect to this deep intention to listen to whatever's alive. We share this connection to Mother Earth with all beings, all a part of her. When we reconnect to this greater intelligence than our own, we realize we have the ability to give voice to her struggles. We come home to our deepest nature because the enormity of the task forces us into a collective response.

Each of us is a community. Each one of our bodies is a community of seventy trillion cells that work together—talk about an ecosystem. In a millisecond, our body processes ten times more operations than there are stars in the universe. That's us. So we're already working together. Whether we know it or not, we can draw strength from this earth, from the planet, and from nature.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu puts it: "What we are doing with this practice is giving back to nature that which we mistakenly appropriated as our own."

We know we didn't make this journey alone. We're all standing on a lot of shoulders. It's just something to

acknowledge.

I'll end with the words of Rumi: "We began as a mineral. We emerged into plant life and into the animal state, and then into being human. And always we have forgotten our former states, except in early spring when we slightly recall being green again. Humankind is being led along an evolving course through this migration of intelligences. And though we seem to be sleeping, there is an inner wakefulness that directs the dream and that will eventually startle us back to the truth of who we are."

Maybe finally just ending with a deep, low bow to whatever it is that you come into contact with when you go inside and listen. Inward and outward.

I appreciate your time and attention. Thank you.

"Thank you so much, Vinny. I think when I go inside right now, I feel like I want to cry. The combination—I feel like that through all of these calls after each teacher speaks."

Thank you so much for those beautiful words of gratitude, Alex. It really speaks to the power of sangha and how connection can transform our sense of isolation around these challenging times we're facing.

The poignancy of what you shared about feeling alone in this work, and then discovering that we're not alone at all—that there are people all over the world who share these same concerns, these same hopes, these same commitments to responding with love to what's happening on our planet. That's really the medicine that sangha offers us.

And I appreciate what you said about working with whatever material we have at hand. Whether it's the frustration, the anxiety, the anger, or even our attachments to particular outcomes—all of this becomes part of our practice, part of our path of awakening. We don't have to wait until we feel differently or until we've resolved all our inner conflicts before we can be of service. We can work with exactly what's present right now.

Let's continue with our sharing. Who else would like to offer something to our global circle? Remember, you can press one on your phone if you'd like to speak.

I think what's emerging so beautifully in this conversation is this recognition that none of us has to carry this alone. Whether we're in San Francisco or Norway or anywhere else in the world, we're part of something much larger than our individual efforts. And that belonging, that sense of being held by something greater, is itself a revolutionary act in a world that often feels fragmented and disconnected.

This is exactly what the Buddha was pointing to when he established the sangha as one of the three jewels. The community of practitioners, the web of relationships committed to awakening and service—this isn't just nice to have, it's essential. It's medicine for the isolation and despair that can arise when we face the magnitude of what needs healing in our world.

Well, I'll just say to you, Alex, thank you for contributing your energy. You're a part of this too, and your gift to others in being present for all of us. So, you know, right back at you.

How about Siobhan? Siobhan Quintero, you're on. We can hear you.

So I think this is for Vinnie or for Chaz. I know for myself, I'm in the midst of creating a business for myself. And I feel a lot of tension between building a business and trying to create a living. I feel stuck when I say successful and then feeling the tension with that in contrast or coupled with this bigger undertaking. It feels to me like the place to start is just to feel where I'm at, but I would really, really love to hear some thoughts from the teachers.

I'm happy to talk with you. I'd just like to understand the question a bit more. Can you say a bit more of exactly what you'd like to explore?

Sure, yeah. So this place of tension between personal advancement, so to speak—like making a living, trying to be successful beyond just paying bills—and also at the same time trying to... like I feel stuck. It's like, well, should I not be doing that because I should just be trying to dedicate all my time and attention to this crisis? And yet that's not realistic. I've got to pay bills. So if you could just speak to the struggle between personal accomplishment, achievement, need, and this greater reality that we seem to be in. Is that helpful?

Yeah, totally. That helps me understand the distinctions you're making here.

Yeah, I think we do have a personal responsibility to our own sustenance, you know. It's almost like when the Buddha was close to enlightenment, and Mara visits yet again saying, "Look, you're going to die, man. This is not going to help anybody. You can actually do some help if you just make this kind of agreement with me." And he comes poised as almost disguised as compassionate. So it's like, we do have to take care of ourselves in order to do any kind of good work. That was the truth of that message in that moment.

So I do believe in being able to sustain ourselves so we can actually stay in the exploration and continue to do our work in the world in whatever way that manifests, right? So what kind of work are you thinking about doing or what kind of work do you do?

Sure. I have what I'm trying to build as a high-end in-home professional pet sitting business. So it's, yeah, it's that part of personal advancement. And of course—well, I shouldn't say of course—for me, a bigger vision of it is wanting to do well financially so that I can give more time and energy and have more visibility in my community to really give to the causes that I care about a lot more and to speak to those causes. And yet I still wonder about my own greed and myself, my concern and the seduction of how I appear to others or... I don't know, I mean, there's just a lot wrapped up in it, I guess.

Yeah, yeah, I totally hear that. I mean, I talked a little bit about where this line lands in us between acceptance of what is and activism, right? So I think that kind of line runs through each one of us where

it's like, okay, how do I most advance this conversation, not only within myself, but how am I part of a larger whole?

And I really do feel like we get our answers when we sit down and listen deeply to our own voice. That's what I wanted to contribute to the conversation after Bonnie and Chaz laid out the landscape so well. I felt like, okay, the only thing that's left for me is to try to bring people back to their bodies and see that these are really where our answers come from—the voice within.

So I think we're all in this balancing act of how much are we building the world and how much are we tending to this inner life. I don't know what to say beyond that. This balancing act is super normal for all of us. And it seems like if you keep connecting to this intention that you have—this beautiful intention to even speak up or be on this call or trying to balance these two energies—I feel like you're in good hands. Does that make sense, Siobhan?

That was perfect. That was great. Thank you.

Thank you.

Okay, well, thank you so much for the participation from everyone. We have to move into wrapping up our conversation today.

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of the teachers for their profound contributions today. I know that all the teachers who participate in our course spend considerable time in deep dialogue together, going deeply into their own practice and inner processes so that they can offer these illuminating glimpses of empowered and deeply embodied communication. I hope these exchanges will inspire us toward our own meaningful conversations and further inquiry and exploration. This isn't simply about receiving ready-made answers, but about each of us claiming our power to engage authentically and explore these vital territories ourselves.

Next week brings our final conversation in this series, and we're deeply excited to welcome Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ayya Santussika Bhikkhuni, Ayya Santacitta Bhikkhuni, and Dr. David Loy, who will guide us in bringing all of these teachings into concrete action. Please note that there's a time change occurring in the USA and perhaps other regions as well, so do check your local listings.

Beyond the conclusion of this series, Werner will be hosting ongoing gatherings, so this is not an ending but rather the beginning of our continued engagement together. Please join us next week for this culminating conversation.

To bring our beautiful and profound dialogue to a close, I invite Bonnie to share blessings with us all in a deeply prayerful way.

Coming back into our bodies, as Chaz and Vinny so beautifully outlined, let us rest in this present moment. The Mangala Sutta teaches us that regardless of how we experienced this hour and a half together, it is conducive of blessings. Let us gather all of these blessings—all the positive energies of practicing the Dharma together—and offer this merit to all our relatives in every direction.

May the positive energies of our practice be dedicated to the happiness, well-being, and awakening of all our relatives: the two-legged, the four-legged, all our winged relatives, the finned ones, and even the creepy crawlers. May they all benefit from our practice.

I offer special mention of all our animal relatives who suffer so tremendously. As Thanissara shared earlier, they are treated so despicably by various industries. May we open our hearts to their suffering and find ways to alleviate it.

We dedicate this merit to all our relatives, both close and distant, throwing no one out of our hearts—even those we might blame or find difficult. Understanding that the root of their greed, hatred, and delusion is our own greed, hatred, and delusion, we extend this dedication to them as well. May they open to the reality of things as they are.

Aho.

Let me also acknowledge Maestro Conference, which has generously supported our conversation today. Maestro Conference provides the advanced teleconference features that enable gatherings like ours. If you'd like to learn more about their services, simply press 1 on your telephone keypad, and they'll send you information about their features and benefits, including a free trial period.

And so we close with deep gratitude—to our teachers, to our team, and to each participant. May we carry everything we've listened to, everything we've sat with, everything we've practiced with today into our hearts, our bodies, our lives, and into the world around us for the benefit of all beings.

Thank you so very much. We'll see you next week.

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