



One Earth Sangha

Being the Earth

Rapture, Rupture, Regeneration

Mark Coleman offered this practice at Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

Good evening everybody. Welcome, welcome, welcome, and welcome to those of you online, wherever you're calling from. It might be good morning to some of you calling from the other hemisphere. So what a beautiful, I guess it's officially spring now. It seems like it's been spring here for a while, but since the clock's turned back, but we don't need the clocks turning back to remind us of the beauty of what happens here in Northern California. My favorite time of year, the winter and the spring when the land comes to life and the streams start to sing and the blossoms bloom and the fragrance in the air. Did you notice a fragrance in the air, the grasses and the bay laurel and just the sweetness of the scents, the pollen. So it's light. It's light now, which is a nice thing. Maybe you'll be a little more awake, maybe, who knows?

So happy to be here and happy to be sharing some reflections this evening. I'm going to be giving reflections, both a meditation and a talk. Will be a talk around what we call EcoDharma, which is an integration of ecology and Buddhist teachings and how Buddhist teachings, practices, meditation, perspectives, shed light on what's happening to where we are as a species and as a planet and ways we may hold what's happening ecologically, how we may meet it, how we may feel in response to it, how we might engage and act, and how it's impacting us because it's impacting us all in different ways. Some of you, it's very forefront of your attention and experience. And some of you it might be more background, but there's nobody here that's not impacted by what's happening ecologically because we are the Earth and the Earth is us and in us. And what happens to the Earth happens to us and vice versa. So from my perspective and from an EcoDharma perspective, it's essential that we learn to integrate that into our way of being, our practice, our understanding, how we live.

So I'm going to guide us in a meditation and then we'll take a short break and then I'll give some reflections. And at this time, we'll have some discussion, time for questions.

So I'm just curious, how many people are new here to Spirit Rock tonight? Just raise your hand. Okay. Welcome. Welcome. The cookies are really good at the break just in case you're wondering. The meditation is like, eh. It's like, well, the cookie coming later. So sorry for those of you online. I don't know. You can maybe get a snack. I don't know. No one's looking.

Okay. So find a posture where you can sit relatively upright, relatively relaxed. Maybe your hands on your legs or on your lap. Rolling your shoulders a little bit. If you're online, you can withdraw your gaze from the screen and to turn the gaze inwards. And if you're in the room, you can also lower your gaze. You can close the eyes.



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But actually, before you do any of that stuff, I invite you to actually look out the window, depending on where you're sitting, just to take in, and if you're at home, look out the window. If you have a window, if it's daylight, just to take in something of the natural world, which could also be a plant on your desk or these plants behind me. And just take in through the eyes. In this case, what we're seeing here is green, grasses, forest, sky, beauty.

And notice how that touches you. What response in the heart arises? If I had my druthers, we'd be doing this outside, but here we are, we're inside, but we're very close to these beautiful hills. The Earth is under us. The sky is always above us. We're always taking in the atmosphere. And then when you're ready, again, tuning back to the living experience of your own body. And your body as a living expression of Earth, we literally come from the Earth, made of the Earth, of soil, nutrients from plants, from the oceans. So feeling your Earth body, the Earth expressing itself as your form, skin, flesh, bones. This is Earth. You are part of the Earth, aware of itself.

And through our senses, the Earth can know itself, can see itself, hear itself, feel itself, smell itself, touch itself. So just feeling into what it feels like to know your body as a landscape, as a terrain of Earth.

As you breathe, the breath is like wind. The winds that move through us, the breeze of the inhale, the wind of the exhale, breathing in oxygen released from the grasses and trees, forests around us. Take in the exhale of the forest.

And as all things are connected, as we inhale and take in oxygen released from photosynthesizing life, that becomes transported through the body, through the heart, through the veins, through blood. The blood coursing through our body like streams. In the same way that the water that we drink that falls from the sky down streams to lakes and aquifers and oceans, that rainwater snow melt becomes our blood, our sweat, our tears. We are skin bound ocean. We shed ocean tears.

So sitting aware of the aliveness of your body, sensing sensations, tingling, vibration, signals of aliveness, energy. Feel the warmth and the energy in the body. It comes from the fire and the energy of the sun. And that distant star keeping us alive as we eat plants and know how to turn light into energy, into nutrients.

Sensing this body elementally as Earth, as water, ocean, as sunlight, energy, as air, wind, and as space. Allowing attention to dwell here in this body in the sensory landscape of experience, sensation, touch, breath, sound, smell.

And for the next part of the meditation, the rest of the meditation, I'm going to be guiding us in an embodied visualization. And if that guidance is helpful, follow along, and if that doesn't work for you for whatever reason, you can just continue sitting as we've been doing.



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I'm going to invite your imagination to broaden. And I'm going to invite you into sensing into the vast oceans. Two thirds of the planet's surface covered in vast, blue, deep oceans. And these oceans have been around for millions and millions and billions of years. Sensing into the vast, blue, clear oceans, teeming with life, teeming with marine life, abundant for millions of years. Visualizing that, sensing that. Imagining yourself as the ocean. Vast, wide, deep, blue, salty, healthy, vibrant. Going back into deep time. For much of your history there was very little life in the ocean. And then a few hundred million years ago, life began to become more complex and gave birth to millions of life forms, trillions of beings, millions of species coming and going, sensing that aliveness of ocean, healthy, vast.

And then fast forward, sensing yourself as the ocean, as you begin to be filled with a foreign substance called plastic, called microplastic, that seeps into every corner of the ocean. Every living thing in the ocean. And the surfaces of your beautiful clear blue waters are now full of plastic and trash and debris and fishing nets and waste. Sometimes choking islands. Sensing into that experience of that shift from health, vibrancy, to depletion of fish and marine life and whales, increasing of debris.

And then even more recently, sensing yourself as that ocean and beginning to see pockets of revival. Areas, vast areas now, coastline protected from fishing, from extraction, beginning to regenerate, fish stocks beginning to multiply, the health returning. Feeling the presence of people concerned, trying to clear the oceans of plastic, of debris, people picking out trash from the shoreline, feeling your body warming. And yet seeds of hope and movements to protect, clean, regenerate.

And then moving on to land, as vast land masses. And now sensing yourself as forest, like the arboreal forests in the northern hemisphere in Canada and Russia, Siberia. Vast, vast millions and millions and millions of acres, beautiful arborial forests. Sensing yourself as forests, tropical rainforests, old redwood forests.

And you've been on the surface of this Earth for millions of years, tens of millions of years, growing, ebbing and flowing with ice ages, meteors, sensing yourself as vast, healthy forest, vibrant, alive, diverse, full of life, full of birds, animals, untouched for millions of years. Changing, fires, droughts, coming and going as part of the natural cycle.

And then fast forwarding your experience of being forest to the last century. And you're beginning to feel the encroachment on your borders, encroachment of cutting, of clearing. And in more recent times, an increase in dehydration and drought, increase in temperatures, increase in vulnerability to bugs, pests, increased vulnerability to mass fires, vast fires, unprecedentedly hot.

And you may also sense a very nascent movement in these things called humans to want to protect and care and steward. You want to regenerate, want to replant vast areas of forest, to again, nurture the health of the forests, to preserve the old growth.



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Moving down from the forests into the plains, into the prairies, into the lowlands, vast grasslands, tall prairie grasses that covered much of North America, growing as far as the eye could see, stretching for hundreds, if not thousands of miles. Mass herds of buffalo, antelope, gazelle, elk, huge populations, animals walking through, as meadow, as prairie, as grasslands, healthy, vibrant, burning periodically, part of the cycles. Also living for millions of years in a constant dance with the landscape, changing conditions, weather, swaying in the wind, sweet scent of grasses.

And then again, fast forwarding to recent times and the shifting, the decimating of the animals that roam through your grasslands, and the turning of those wild prairies and open spaces and valleys into agriculture, into rows of corn, rows of wheat. And your soil, the land, is beginning to be poisoned with chemicals and nitrates. And now what replaced you as prairie and wild grasslands, rows of crops. As far as the eye can see, monocrops, few animals, few insects, sound of birds disappeared.

And again, in small isolated pockets, there's a shift away from that monoculture. Beginning seeds of reclaiming that biodiversity that was once inherent in that landscape. An invitation for the animals to return, Predators, beavers, songbirds, nurturing of the soil, nurturing of complexity and diversity.

Moving now down from the prairies again to the shoreline, into that rich area of growth and life along the shoreline. 90% of all life in the oceans grows along the shoreline, just a few miles wide. Coral reefs and kelp grow. Sensing yourself now as tropical, colorful, vibrant coral, so many shapes and forms and colors and billions and billions of fish in all colors and shapes and sizes swimming among you and the brain coral and the fans, beautifully integral ecosystem, life, food, cycles. Also having lived in these oceans for as far as the ocean has memory, deep time.

And then in the last century, the presence of warming temperatures, warming seas, and the impact on the coral, bleaching the coral, cutting off the food source of both coral and all the fish that survive on the coral. And so turning these vast tropical colorful playgrounds into graveyards.

And again, you notice that there's pockets, people incredibly creative, finding ways to regenerate the coral reefs on old sunken boats and discarded metal, finding ways to keep the coral alive, to allow new coral to be birthed, pockets, small pockets, but still pockets of hope, of aliveness.

Wandering into the Sahara, into the vast deserts of Northern Africa, West Africa. And the borderlands, this ever shifting dance of desert, forest, feeling the ancientness of this vast, sandy, hot desert. And the green spaces that border it, that have begun receding with the heat and the drought, but also an incredible regeneration of that border where the land in the desert has begun to be reclaimed and watered and tended in vast, vast stretches of what was once arid



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desert is now becoming fertile. Fecund. Trees are growing. Birds are returning. Farmers are growing crops.

Everywhere on this Earth, this movement, this back and forth, the losses and the creativity and response.

As a young girl, teenage girl in Scandinavia, you may imagine yourself as her. Her name's Greta. She's so moved by the horrors that she's reading about. Global warming and loss of species. And so she sits by herself on a cold day on a Friday with a sign - on strike. Refusing to go to school because she wants society, adults to wake up, sitting there alone for a long time, week after week.

And then at some point word gets around and this sparks a movement. And on a particular day, she's not sitting alone. There's hundreds and hundreds of thousands of school children across the world in 125 countries on strike, on Friday protesting the inaction by governments, corporations. She's no longer alone.

And lastly, coming back to ourselves, sensing yourself. Maybe sensing yourself on your phone, reading the newspaper, looking at a screen, maybe sitting in your house alone, wondering, I'm so small. Problems are so big. Maybe feeling helpless or confused or angry or sad, worried about your children, grandchildren, the Earth.

And then you come to a place like this, to a meeting like this. You connect with other people who are engaged, who care, who love the Earth, who are committed to doing something. Just like Greta, you no longer feel alone. You realize you're part of a vast network. The Earth's immune system that's waking up to what we're losing. That's waking up to grief. That's waking up to realizing we need to radically transform how we live.

Close with some words from a meditator who comes here to Spirit Rock and who dedicated her life to climate action. Her name is China, "The trees don't stop growing if half the forest is clear cut. The waves still move upon the shore even as the ocean fills with plastic. The rivers flow as long as even a trickle of water moves down its length. The birds sing even in the smog. Children play even in war. So it must be for us turning love into practice step by step by step."

So that is not the typical meditation that we normally do here at Spirit Rock. In fact, that was the first time I've led that meditation, but it came to me this morning. And I thought, why not? Why not? Since we are the Earth and ocean and sky and everything, why not visualize oneself as the ocean? I think, and I'll talk more about this after the break, but I think partly the reason we are where we are is because we have an inability to feel ourselves as ocean and feel what it's like to be heating up and drowning in plastic or to be a forest that's drying up and burning.

Actually, there's one part of that visualization that I was going to have us visualize. Vast fresh water lake, like the Great Lakes up in the north. Vast. We'll just do that for a second. Visualize



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yourself as this vast lake. So big you can't see the other side of the lake. Some of you know these lakes maybe from near where these lakes are. Imagine yourself as vast as Lake Erie, deep, clear, water pouring in from rain and snow. And then again, recently filling up with chemicals and with oils. So much oil that you catch on fire 14 times. The lake burns 14 times. There's so much pollution in the lake, oil, chemicals.

And then that wakes up people to realizing, oh, there's no, we're all living downstream. And so one of the instigators for the environmental movement was the burning of that lake. The surface of the lake, mind you, but the toxicity on the lake. And then the last 50 years, tremendous efforts to clean and to shift the pollution in a way. And now ecologists release sturgeon and other fish into the lake and it's becoming beautiful and clear again, just like many rivers.

I grew up in Newcastle, which was a very industrial northern town, coal mining, ship building. And the factories and the river was just, when I grew up, it was just this toxic slime. And now they've seen dolphins swim down it. 40 years of environmental efforts. So change is possible.

All right. So let's take a break. Feel free to stretch. Please say hello to someone next to you. You can introduce yourself as ocean, forest, sky, or whatever you like.

And we'll come back at 7:30. Thank you.