



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

Vandana Shiva – Earth Democracy

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Opening Quote – Vandana Shiva (00:04): *We could get rid of climate change. We have to stop the greenhouse gas emissions, we've got to stop fossil fuels. But while we do that, we've got to bring the life back to the earth. And that is our work of growing food. And isn't it amazing that in growing good food, we regenerate the soil, we regenerate the soil organisms, we regenerate our gut, we regenerate the climate systems, we close the broken system of carbon and nitrogen. These disorders will only be healed when we see the wholeness, and when we recognize in the wholeness that there is amazing self-organized capacity. And self-organization means self-healing. And self-healing means we have the power within.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:52): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. We are back in your feeds today with another bonus episode. This one's a little bit different than our usual shows, because we wanted to bring you a special presentation from this year's Summer Research Institute, which took place online back in June. The theme for this year was The Mind, the Human-Earth Connection, and the Climate Crisis. And we wanted to share this powerful talk from one of our speakers, Vandana Shiva. Like many of our guests on this show, Vandana has a very interdisciplinary background. She trained first as a physicist, and then went into environmental work. And she's now a renowned ecofeminist, food sovereignty advocate, and environmental activist.

(01:38) So what you're about to hear is about a 25-minute presentation from Vandana followed by some Q&A from the audience. And all of this is moderated and introduced by Dekila Chungyalpa, who is another extraordinary environmentalist who we also just featured on the podcast back in May.

(01:56) The reason I was really keen to share this talk with you is because what Vandana speaks about is so much at the heart of what we discuss here on this show—namely, the role of the human mind in creating and healing disconnection and suffering in the world. Amazingly, in this short time, Vandana, seamlessly weaves together topics like Cartesian dualism, quantum physics, climate science, the history of wars and systems of oppression, the gut microbiome, solutions for climate change, and more. The overarching theme here is the rich interconnectedness of nature. And the deep need that we see ourselves as part of that whole, and not separate from it.

(02:41) I was pretty blown away by Vandana's words, and I've actually returned to them many times to try to more fully integrate all the wisdom that's packed into this talk. I hope that you are moved as well. So here is, first, Dekila Chungyalpa, introducing Vandana Shiva.

Dekila Chungyalpa (03:02): Tashi delek, namaste, hello. My name is Dekila Chungyalpa. I'm the co-founder and director of The Loka Initiative at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a capacity building and outreach platform for faith and indigenous leaders on environmental and climate issues. And I'm honored to be part of the Summer Research Institute Planning Committee for Mind & Life this year.

(03:23) The first thing I'd like to do is acknowledge the lands that I'm on. I'm on the ancestral territory of the Ho-Chunk people. This area is known as Dejope, which refers to the four sacred lakes that surround Madison. As a daughter of the Himalayas, it gives me so much pleasure to introduce another daughter of the Himalayas, Dr. Vandana Shiva, who is joining us today from Dehradun in Himachal Pradesh in India. I doubt she needs an introduction. But what I can say is that she's an intellectual powerhouse, writer, activist, the builder of a global seed movement, the personification of courage under fire, and sometimes referred to as Monsanto's worst nightmare. She is one of my great heroes and the inspiration and guide for ecofeminists around the world.

(04:09) Dr. Shiva's new documentary *The Seeds of Vandana Shiva* has just released, which I invite you to check out. Dr. Shiva will deliver her presentation, Earth Democracy: Connecting the Rights of Mother earth and the Well-being of All, after which we will be able to take some questions from our Summer Research Institute participants. Vandana-ji, namaste and I turn it over to you.

Vandana Shiva (04:31): Dear Dekila, it's such a joy to be with you. It's a joy to be part of the Summer Institute at Mind & Life. Just two little corrections on your introduction. It's not my documentary, someone decided to make a documentary of me and I was trying so hard to avoid it. But they were persistent, and they've made *Seeds of Vandana Shiva*. I'm grateful now because there's large parts of my life that I had forgotten myself, and they brought back all of those memories. So I'm very, very grateful to them.

(05:02) And when you talk about me being Monsanto's worst nightmare... I've just finished writing a promotional blurb for a very touching book on femicide, the killing of women. And it's inspired really by women who are having to fight to defend their land, and then they are ones who are being raped and killed. And it's come out of a dialogue they've been having. And this indigenous woman says, "Why are our dreams, their nightmares?"

(05:33) And I think this is the central issue in the Earth-humanity connection, that a very tiny group of men just give themselves the power to go invade other people's homes, other people's lands. And people think that that colonialism is over. But from the witnessing of the amazing women who are turning the violence against them into a courage to create a new world, you realize that the globalization might be at one level, a new phenomenon, but it's an old phenomenon. It's the old phenomenon of colonialism. All indigenous cultures don't just see themselves as part of the earth, they actually see themselves as children of Mother earth. The earth is our mother and we are the children; Pachamama gives us the guidance. Every culture till the year... 500 years ago, till Columbus. And that rupture really is the disconnection between humans and the Earth.

(06:45) But it had to be scaffolded, it had to be put on stilts, because it was such an artificial concept. And this artificial concept was built by creating an infrastructure of genocide, an infrastructure of ecocide in the mind. And I'm seeing this from the fact that... you know, you introduced me as daughter of the Himalaya, and I am. And even though my early life and all my formal training is in physics, and I

was inspired so much by Einstein, it's really the Chipko movement—the movement of women coming out to hug the trees—that I call my university of ecology, my university of spiritual activism.

(07:41) And so I learned my non-separation through quantum theory as a discipline, but the philosophy of non-separation, of us being part of the earth, really comes from Chipko. And then all my engagements, now over five decades, with movements. The thing that troubled me a lot was, why do women always rise? Why do the women of Chipko rise? Why do the women on the coast fight shrimp industrial aquaculture? Why do the women victims of Bhopal continue to stand in resistance even today, against the injustice of 1984 when thousands died when a pesticide plant leaked in the city of Bhopal?

(08:24) And in trying to understand that and answer that question, I wrote *Staying Alive*, and went to the roots of the thinking that naturalized separation from the earth. That naturalized violence against the earth. And you know, when you're doing physics, you do physics. You don't read the big men who were the fathers of modern science. You don't read the Bacons and you don't read the Descartes. In philosophy you do maybe, but not in physics. But I read them all. I read them all. And this structure of disconnection, the intellectual architecture of disconnection was laid in that period.

(09:05) But that period was also when, on the one hand, people who continued to believe they were part of the earth were defined as witches. Most of them are women. Nine million were killed in Europe, nine million. It was a genocide taking place exactly at the same time, when the Indigenous people of North America were being wiped out. And it is time for us to bring those two streams together. The witch hunts and the witch hunts of the Indigenous people, because they were both about forcing separation. "How dare you think that you're part of the earth? That is dangerous thinking, that makes you a witch." And coming back to this beautiful book I'm just reading to write a promotional blurb, they're talking about a witch hunt and then they're saying, "And we have come back." The end of this book is, "We are back, we are not going to give up."

(10:04) Bacon said that we have to torture nature and make her our slave. Now Bacon was the chancellor of England, and was also in charge of the witch hunts. So he was bringing all his torture mechanisms into his thinking of science. And he wrote a book called *The Masculine Birth of Time*, because the idea of a mother earth was a feminine idea, and that had to be killed. And then he writes that we have to create this slavery of nature. And we've got to dominate her in order to have our dominion over the world. So imperialism of the mind, and imperialism as a colonial project went totally hand in hand.

(10:48) But then you had... You know, most people don't realize how Cartesian our thinking has become. How everything has been reduced to measurement, quantification, size, weight. Qualities have just gone, relationships have just gone. And that death was shaped by Descartes, who writes in his methods, he actually says, "I am a thinking being—" No, he says, "I'm thinking thing." He can't see himself as a being because you can't be. Being means to be alive.

(11:24) I'm a thinking thing without a body. Now, just imagine that. Just imagine, thinking thing without a body means I'm not of the earth. Because the body that connects us to the earth, of course, our consciousness also connects us to the earth. But if you have forced your consciousness down the line, saying, "I think and others don't, because the others are too bodily, they're still creatures of the earth." And sadly, that period didn't just separate us from the earth. It separated the mind from body, and created a very artificial idea of what the mind is—very Cartesian, very mechanical, very militaristic. And

also very privileged, because it didn't just deny the mind to an intelligence to a living earth and every one of our organisms, every plant, every microbe, every seed, her whole complex systems as Gaia. (James Lovelock called her Gaia, when he realized that she creates her own systems of climate. He said, "She is a living organism." And Gaia is the name of the earth goddess in Greek. And here he was, a NASA scientist.) So all the way from the tiny molecule to our cells, to organisms, to ecosystems, all the way to the planet. There is creativity, intelligence, consciousness pervading. In all our learning, in all our spiritual traditions, we don't just see ourselves as materially connected to the earth, the fact that we get our food from the earth, we get our bread from the earth, we get our water from the earth. But that consciousness is the currency of a sacred universe. And we are connected through consciousness.

(13:14) So the desacralization of the earth went hand in hand with the desacralization of the human being. And the human being was then reduced to just two: the master and the slave. And I know that Indigenous people will totally relate to this because they have lived through it. We are still living through it. And I think we all need to become much more conscious about it. Now, this system of rupture of our relationship between humans and the earth, and between our minds and our bodies, and then robbing most people of their minds, so that some privileged men could say, "We have minds and you are just bodies, which we can exploit. You as women are mere bodies without minds, so you will be our slaves. The Africans whom we captured to work on the cotton fields are just bodies. And we will buy and sell you."

(14:11) So many histories come together in this disconnection, but the moment today is—many histories must come together in the regeneration. And that I believe, is what this summer school is trying to achieve. There's the history of the earth itself, evolving over four billion years, creating all the diversity of life forms. And those life forms created the climate.

(14:38) And we have another disconnect. People talk about the atmosphere as if it has nothing to do with the biosphere. And I have spent the last 25 years trying to figure out this connection. I've been working on biodiversity since I got involved with Chipko. I've been working with agriculture since '84 when I saw Bhopal and I saw Punjab and the violence. But I realized that most of the emissions that are creating the climate change... We used to call it the "greenhouse gas" phenomena, and I think it was a clearer language. Because people could see: here's pollution, it creates a greenhouse, it allows the heat of the sun to come in, and it doesn't allow the heat to escape. And so it's like a greenhouse. And that's why we are having these impacts. It's when we moved into the kind of more abstract language of "climate change" and into merely measuring the residues in this atmosphere, that people got disconnected.

(15:38) So I wrote my book *Soil Not Oil* in the lead up to the Copenhagen summit. And I said, "Whether it is for emissions, or it is for bringing down emissions, and creating a non fossil fuel world, we have to reconnect not just the humans and the earth, we have to reconnect different parts of the earth, and different aspects and dimensions of the human being." That is the moment we are in. That's the emerging moment of reconnection, of regeneration.

(16:16) So greenhouse gas pollution is also a very recent phenomenon. If you think the human-earth disconnection is a 500-year-old phenomenon, the disconnection of ourselves from a living earth as a web of life, is only 200 years ago, because till then we were living on biodiversity. We knew everything comes from plants. And then we got the technologies, and the power. Or I shouldn't say "we," it was Standard Oil, it was Rockefeller, who managed to control all the oil of the world. And before that the British with their coal.

(16:53) But all of the fossil fuels; coal, oil, and now gas that's been fracked, have been fossilized by the earth out of living matter, over 600 million years. And I always say, she kept the living carbon above her for us to use. And she put the dead carbon below so we wouldn't touch it, we'd leave it underground. And we thought mastery was drilling it and fracking it and mining it. And that mastery is what has given us climate change. But we didn't just stop at that. We then destroyed the world's geographies, and we put lines everywhere to create empires of carbon. Just like in the earlier time, the colonial empires were created by which country was invading. Now, if you look at the Middle East... The Middle East was, today even Palestine, everything is related to carbon. Because after the war, the British and the French just got together, two crooked men got together and made maps in the sand and said, "We'll divide it this way amongst us." And then they left everyone fighting, everyone else. So dead carbon has created wars.

(18:14) I'll also say, dead carbon has fossilized our minds into that very mechanistic thinking. And it has fossilized our hearts. Because by escaping our responsibilities to the earth, and to each other, by thinking we can buy our way out with oil, we became indifferent. We became indifferent to life on earth. And we created an agriculture which has huge mastery and carelessness. Tools of carelessness, pesticides that kill, fertilizers that emit a greenhouse gas—nitrous oxide—which is 300 times more damaging to the climate than carbon dioxide. And most people don't look at it. This is the most damaging. And if you look at what are the ruptures in the planetary boundaries, the big ruptures... The work at the Stockholm Resilience Institute has done these planetary boundaries. But if you look at the two real big ruptures, one is species extinction and biodiversity erosion. And the second is nitrogen.

(19:19) And because we've destroyed biodiversity from doing its work, and shifted to fossil fuel-based chemicals, we are emitting huge greenhouse gases from agriculture today. Agriculture and the food system, I say in my book *Soil Not Oil*, now we are eating oil. We are not eating food, we are not eating the gifts of soil. We are not eating the gifts of plants, we are eating oil. Oil, whether it is the embodied oil or the packaging in the plastic, or the long distance, food marts...

(19:52) Well, let me give you the figures. 11 to 15% of emissions come from the way we produce, with nitrogen fertilizers, heavy machinery, destroying small farms, which produce 80% of the food. 80% of the food doesn't come from these large farms. And these large farms are so hungry for profit, they don't know when to stop. So they invade the Amazon, or GMO soil, most of it goes for biofuel and animal feed. But it's the invasions into the forests that are behind the COVIDs and the coronas, and the SARS, and the Eboas and HIVs. The last 30 years of globalization, which is the globalization of greed, has created new epidemics. But it has also created disease, the chronic diseases. This invasion into forests, that's just called "land use change"—no, it's deforestation, it's invasion into the Indigenous territories, which even today hold 80% of the biodiversity of the world. They're left with 20% of the land, but they're still protecting 80%. Isn't this magical? The small farmers we're left with nothing are giving us 80% of the food. Indigenous people who've been left with no land are giving us 80% conservation of biodiversity. And we still want to trash them, the small farmers and the Indigenous people, because of this separation in the mind. And the idea of conquest, and the idea of mastery.

(21:16) And then we take good food, which we could eat—fresh, local, biodiverse, organic—and mess it up, and turn it into ultra processed food, which is 75% of the chronic diseases. You know, Monsanto doesn't exist anymore, it was bought by Bayer, so I had to find a new friend. And my new friend is Bill Gates. And Bill Gates is so desperate for us to never eat real food again. He's so desperate to patent every seed, and patent all artificial lab-made food. But all sacred traditions, see food as sacred. See us as

embodiment of food. So if food is hyper-processed, transported, packaged, Amazon is now... Amazon has a grocery and I look at it and I hold my head in India where the vegetable guy comes to your doorstep. And I keep thinking of the ecological footprint of this super, super hyper e-commerce distribution system. It's already 15 to 20%. Waste is 4%. We are talking about a 50% contribution to greenhouse gases, and the animal part is within it. It's not separate from it. But factory farming causes the emissions, it causes methane. Again, my dear friend, Bill Gates thinks the problem is the cows. Just like he also thinks the problem is the sun.

(22:41) So this disconnected mind takes nature and says, "You're the problem, and I have to discipline you even more." Google has a new life sciences division. And they're talking about, "We have to defeat Mother Nature." Poor guys, I feel sad for them. I feel sad for them that in the midst of this awakening of humanity to a living earth, a living consciousness, human beings who are conscious beings. Even at this time, they're trying to stamp out consciousness, stamp out life, stamp out interconnectedness. And I think it's a bit of a desperate measure. I've called this separation "ecological apartheid," because we recognize apartheid—separation, the violence it did to South Africa. But an ecological apartheid leads to human apartheid. And resource hunger for a very wasteful economy.

(23:38) How do we correct this? We correct it by realizing we are part of the earth and she's our mother. And if we are part of the earth, every being, it doesn't matter whether human beings or not, but every being, every tree, every animal, every microbe is part of an amazing earth family. In India, we call it vasudeva kutumbakam.

(24:01) Earth democracy for me, it's just recognizing that. Recognizing that the earth is alive, and we are part of her living systems. And our interconnectedness with each other makes us a family. There are no hierarchies in earth democracy—there cannot be, because we are all, not just [human]... Earth beings, we are more than human beings. And I think a lot of the identity politics, which also becomes very, very conflictual, needs to move into the only true identity that we have. We are earth beings. And as earth beings, we are not atomistic, we are not separate. We are not insulated, we are interbeings.

(24:43) Now can you imagine, when our dear Descartes says, "I'm a thinking thing without a body," he obviously had no idea that his brain was working because he had a gut. The gut is being called the second brain. And it works to the extent you give it good food. The second brain has so much diversity and so much neurological activity going on. Let me just share with you this very, very brief quote from one of the leading mind-gut scientists who says, "We were till recently thinking in a militarized mechanistic way. And we couldn't understand where the diseases were coming from. And it's only when we realize the interconnectedness, this relationship between the mind and the gut, we realize it's the messing up of the gut, the gut microbiome."

(25:42) And now everyone knows that there are 100 trillion microbes in the gut. 90% of us is other beings. We are only 10%. So we better get rid of anthropocentrism, we better get rid of human arrogance. But those amazing beings are in a huge neurological connection, just like in the web, in the soil, huge neurological connections. There are 50 to 100 million nerve cells in our gut. And that's why it's called the enteric nervous system. And as you go deeper into this distributed intelligence through our bodies, the connection of our distributed intelligence, as one intelligence, with the intelligence of the earth, we realize that we have a huge potential to make a change.

(26:32) I have dedicated my life to service for the earth. I've dedicated my life to care for the earth. And I'm now realizing that the biggest economy is earthcare, which naturally becomes care for each other

because we are members of the same family. We are not separate. So rights of Mother earth become human rights. Earthcare becomes care for human beings.

(26:56) And so many of my medical friends are moving into organic farming. Cancer doctors are moving into organic farming to say we cannot take care of cancer if we keep ruining our bodies with poisons. So returning to our sacred place in a sacred earth means we have to start thinking of food in a sacred way. Because food is the biggest connection, both in terms of how much of the harm it is doing when it's produced with ill intent, greed and violence, but how much good it could do.

(27:31) My work shows me that we could get rid of climate change in 10 years. We have to stop the greenhouse gas emissions, we've got to stop fossil fuels, we can't go to net zero trick, we got to go to absolute zero. But while we do that, we've got to bring the life back to the earth. And that is our work of growing food. And isn't it amazing that in growing good food, we regenerate the soil, we regenerate the soil organisms. And together with plants and biodiversity and our soil organisms, we regenerate our gut. We regenerate the climate systems. We close the broken system of carbon and nitrogen. Because climate change is a metabolic disorder at the planetary level, just like diabetes and obesity are metabolic disorders with bad food at our bodily level. These metabolic disorders will only be healed when we see the wholeness and when we recognize in the wholeness, that there is amazing self-organized capacity. And self-organization means self-healing. And self-healing means we have the power within. And that power within is waiting to burst.

(28:42) My work on quantum theory taught me how the whole world is really one massive quantum coherence. And that's what non-separation is. And if physics has woken us to the quantum coherent universe of interconnectedness, and ecology has woken us to the quantum coherence of biological ecological interconnectedness (spiritual traditions have always told us that), isn't it time to put the petty games of petty minds aside and find the power to not let their destructive games carry on? Because they are playing games like kids who never grew up. For them, the earth is a Lego set—you engineer her climate, you engineer her genes. And I really see, you never grow up out of your playing with toys. Grow up. Grow up and be part of the sacred universe. It's a joy. Thank you.

Q&A Session

Dekila Chungyalpa (29:36): Thank you so much. That was so incredibly powerful. There were just so many things you said that resounded, right? The idea of a fossilized mind, the fossilized heart, the decentralization we see in our bodies and in nature, the interconnectedness that you mentioned. I'm just so blown away. I know you've talked a lot about the self-organizing principle at the cellular level and the earth, and what we're seeing in community as well. So I'm sure we have a lot of questions from our Summer Research Institute participants. So I'm going to turn over now to the Q&A section.

(30:12) So the first question that's come in is from Rochelle Gould. And what she asks is, "Your point about how Cartesian thinking has become so crucial. Could you speak to how you think integrating contemplative and scientific traditions can help to bring us into a new way of thinking?"

Vandana Shiva (30:34): Well, the Cartesian paradigm and mind, A, destroys relationships, because nothing is related to anything else. The second thing it destroys is quality. But when I relate to you with compassion, it's a relationship of quality. I can't bring a yardstick and measure it. It lends itself to the experience of relating and being. It doesn't lend itself to a third party coming and measuring.

(31:10) And to connect it back to my opening remarks on colonization... There was a Britisher who said, "We came and conquered India with a sword in one hand, and a yardstick in the other." So yardsticks have always been colonial empire building, making maps, quantifying. And in a way, we are going through the ultimate quantification right now. Everything we are saying is being quantified into tiny little bits of data, and then that's being communicated. And this is part of what we need to be reflecting on, the ontological reality that this is shaping.

(31:48) So like I said, I quoted many, many, many of the scientists. You know, I do a lot of work just for my love for the earth. And then six years later, scientists will write to me and say, "Oh, that stuff you wrote about, it's quite amazing. I found this in science." I don't have labs, I don't have expensive equipment, all I have is my being in service of the earth. This is my lab. But so many scientists are working on this. And all the spiritual traditions have told us this. In a way, what we have to do is get the dust off. So much of what our traditions were... Why were we for 10,000, 20,000 years stable societies, ecologically stable? Because we lived by this moral law of the earth that we cannot violate. And that's what sustainability is. Non-sustainability is, "I'm going to trample her, she's dead. She's my property, and there's no consequence."

(32:48) So both spiritual traditions and science are coming there, except that the science... The only place where you're getting real science are scientists who are not in the pay of corporations. Because the minute there's money, they make you fix science. So there's a lot of fixed science going around. I've lived through it with the GMO debates and Monsanto you know, and me being Monsanto's nightmare... Because I just stuck to my truth. I knew the seed is living. It's not Monsanto's machine, it's not Monsanto's property. So both are totally converging. But you have to look at independent science, that is seeking how things work, not in the service of what I call money making.

Dekila Chungyalpa (33:36): We have a question from Beth Blissman, and I can see your hand is up. Beth, would you just directly ask the question of Vandana-ji?

Beth Bluesman (33:50): Yes. I had a question, particularly from a US context. For those of us, women, who are doing the work and joining you in recognizing the real value in life, especially of seeds, I'm wondering about your favorite and best strategies for working with men—and there seem to be so many in our country who don't yet understand how patriarchy harms them as well. What are your best strategies for working with men in that current setting to bring them to an understanding of earth as Gaia, as a living being, and bringing them closer to what you're talking about? Thank you.

Vandana Shiva (34:32): What I've learned over these many years is those who have enjoyed a position of power, and treat it as natural, as the natural order of things, if someone shows how artificially constructed it is, and upheld by our assumptions, and you try and argue that out, it never works. There's more polarization, there's more defensiveness. So invite them to be part of the good work. When you save a seed and plant a garden, you don't have a debate about patriarchy, you just get rid of it. Because a man and a woman in a garden are equal earth citizens.

(35:18) And let me just mention for people who want to have more of these kinds of issues. We offer a course in October—I call it now Return to the Earth, but it is everything to do with how to farm with love, and respecting the earth. So we talk about living seed and everything we need to learn about seed, living soil, everything we need to do to regenerate the soil, the different ways of composting. Living food, how food itself is the currency of life. But food and health and food and nutrition, we have

amazing team of doctors who work on it. And then because this is what's troubling people with the COVID, the lockdown, the economy collapsing for the poor, and increasing for the rich. You know, the poor have lost 3.7 trillion. When I say poor, it's the working people everywhere. 3.7 trillion evaporated. 3.9 trillion more money made by the billionaires.

(36:21) So the economy of food has to be a place where we turn for regenerating new economies. And we've got to be very creative about it. So we also talk about local living economies and circular economies. So go to the navdanya.org website, or key in Navdanya Earth University Courses, and you'll find the details. And we welcome many, many of you to join me in this journey. Because it's a hard journey, but hard doesn't mean not joyful. You know, having a baby...Labor, the word labor comes from the word birthing. And when you get into labor pains, of course it's painful. But out comes this amazing baby. So the idea that you can have fruits without labor is the other fossilized idea. Because what was fossil fuel getting rid of? Work. What is digitalization getting rid of? Work. So reclaiming work as sanctity, I think is part of our work. And that's where we become equal, men and women, brown and white. All the colors, all the richnesses that have been in hateful hierarchies can be turned into joyful horizontalities.

Dekila Chungyalpa (37:42): We have a question that's come up on sacredness several times by several different people. So I'm going to try and merge them. Audrey asked what your definition of the sacred is. And in relation to that, Pooja Sahni asked, "What are practical steps to bring this awareness of sacredness to youth in particular today?"

Vandana Shiva (38:03): For me, sacredness is that which is not violable, inviolable. And that means you recognize the intrinsic worth, the intrinsic value, the agency, the autonomy, the self-organization. And the minute you recognize that, then in your mind, you draw the lines of what you cannot violate. So ecological limits come up and ethical limits come up, and they become part of your natural functioning. You know how not to violate. You do that in family, don't you? How not to violate space. You learn how to carve out respect for each other.

(38:40) Well, the beauty is nature does it all the time. Nature does it all the time—constantly creates more space for the other, and does not take space away. Now that I think is the learning from nature. Quantum theory taught me non-separation, but what it could not teach me is the living processes. And what I'm now waking up to is the economy of life is an economy of giving. And an economy of giving creates more abundance. And more abundance means there's more to share. And that's what soil organisms do, that's what a seed does. I've got a seed sitting right here next to me. Now that seed is not going to stay a seed like that. A machine would stay a machine like this. But a seed will become a bean plant, will give me thousands of beans, and some of which I can sow again. In any case, while it's doing its growing, it's going to fix nitrogen for me. Show me a machine that can do that, and will give us free nitrogen, and will give us healthy protein. This is what we have to learn from nature and that is the sacred. The sacred means reverence, respect, and recognition of non-violation.

Dekila Chungyalpa (40:01): So beautiful. Thank you so much. So we have another series of questions around restoring the relationship with nature. Azure asked how may we encourage and restore the relationship with nature at a grassroots level. And I see other questions. So what I'm going to do is ask Victor, who has his hand raised, to ask his question directly.

Victor (40:24): Hi. Thank you very much, Vandana. My question is... Well, I'm from Columbia, South America. And here you see all the time Indigenous populations telling us once and over again, that

Mother earth is our mother, that we're in a sacred connection. And you see all day, every time, big companies trying to make those people (the 20% you talked about) part of the market, part of their production change. And the cities seem to be like, far away from the debate, far away from all this turmoil. And my question is, how do you bring this sacred connection from the level of consciousness to cities, and especially these South American and Third World cities, which are just oceans of buildings, without trees, without grass, where people really feel they are days apart from nature?

Vandana Shiva (41:34): I think part of that disconnect that I told you, this whole Cartesian thing that we are things without bodies, made us forget that everyone, even in a city, has to eat. And the more they forget the thoughtfulness about eating, the more sick they're getting, the more their health bills are increasing. So the connection has to be through food, but food and health. And then everyone wakes up to the fact that we need to eat well. If you are to eat well, you'd better reconnect to the farmer who's taking care of the earth. So your reconnection then allows the farmer to also stay on the land. And that's why I say, "Conscious eating is co-production." Because you're joining the earth, in your mind, you're joining the farmer, and you are becoming the countervailing force to the big corporations, by being the caring partner with the farmers.

(42:32) And this is the work we'll have to do. It won't happen overnight. But things are happening. Earlier this evening, I was addressing the Sri Lankans. [The] Sri Lankan government has said, "We are going to go 100% organic," they banned chemical imports. A country, a whole country. I work with seven states in my country, Sikkim. I worked with the chief minister there to make Sikkim an organic state. Doesn't always work to 100%. But I'd rather have 100% commitment and maybe a 1% failure, than 100% commitment to spread disease and poisons.

Dekila Chungyalpa (43:08): Next we have a question from Matthias, who's 10 years old, who is in Brazil. His question is, "What can we as the young generation do to help all of us and Mother earth?"

Vandana Shiva (43:23): Well, love her. First become aware that she's your mother. Then just like you give your mother love, give Mother earth love. And how do you give Mother earth love? I keep saying, "Grow a garden." And the garden can begin with one pot in your window sill. Never make an excuse. When I started to save seeds, I could have made a huge excuse, and said, "Oh, my God. Monsanto wants to own the seed. But I'm not a farmer. And I know nothing about seed." And I could have sat back. I didn't know anything about seed. I taught myself. I started to reach out to farmers. I started to farm now.

(43:58) So begin with whatever steps are available to you. But when you have love that is deep enough, the small steps come. But the garden is a place to begin. And we have this decade to turn around this world from being wars, distress, COVID and coronas, to being gardens—of health, gardens of hope, gardens of happiness.

Dekila Chungyalpa (44:26): I know you have spent five decades, I won't say fighting, but regenerating a revolution, right? In terms of addressing the discrepancy of power in particular, and what it does to poor people, what it does to farmers, what it does to Indigenous people. There's a series of questions actually around this issue of inequity, and I'm going to read one of them. Sarah Mackay asks, "How do you engage people in positions of political and monetary power to become open and curious about systemic issues they are a part of (and I would say systemic issues they create), and then not rush to solutions due to distress that may arise?" She adds, "I think grassroots will of the people is so important. But I also

think we need to find ways of collaborating with those entrenched in capitalistic models of well-being, who currently have the most influence."

(45:19) I think when I talk about Earth Democracy and us being Earth citizens, we have to shift our mind to realize that so many of the hierarchies of power are constructs. And if they are constructs, and if we are in a process of change, we should not lock ourselves in to imagine that the power of the hierarchy is the only power. We have to start finding the many, many, many kinds of power. And those many kinds of power, then have to be cultivated. They don't just happen... You know, the seed is there, but if I don't take care of it, it won't give me a plant. If I don't give it fertile soil, it will be a very, very low production. So you have to cultivate.

(46:11) And I am such a dedicated believer in diversity at every level—in biodiversity, in cultural diversity, in diversity of intelligences. And in diversity of political strategies. And that means that different people are effective in different alliances. It also means in different times in particular society's histories, different things. I've written most of the laws related to biodiversity in my country. But there's windows when they are enlightened governments, like right now in Sri Lanka there's a government that says we'll go organic. If doors are open, you work with them. When doors are closed, you work wherever there is an opening. But I would say never fall into the trap—the 500-year trap of separation—that money is power. Money is the power to extract, but money is not the power to give. And that's why I always say, use money as a tool, use money as a servant. But don't let it ever become your master. Use tools and technologies as a servant, but never let the master's technologies become your masters.

Dekila Chungyalpa (47:28): I'm going to turn to people who have their hands up, so they can directly ask. Corissa, would you like to ask your question directly?

Corissa (47:36): So my question is, as an educator, I'm aware that we perpetuate the systems of disconnection. I think our children come into our K12 settings, young children are very connected to the earth already. They're connected to each other. They have that depth of interconnection. And then at least in the West, that disconnection starts in our educational system. So my question is, what is maybe a way for us to begin to change that sense of separation that kids get at a very early age, coming into the school system?

Vandana Shiva (48:14): It might sound repetitive, but I would again, say, "Garden." Garden, and in nature. Especially with this lockdown, and young people having so much more time with the screens and their gadgets, I think we owe it to future generations to know their full earthiness. And whichever way they can—putting their hands in the dirt in a garden, taking a walk in the forest or a park. And through that... I've done this work with schools in India. And I can teach them math, I can teach them biology, I can teach them geography. Everything is there for you to teach. The idea that there are certain disciplines that are only in the books, and can't be taught, is ignoring the fact that every discipline has an illustration and example in living systems. The only thing that you won't be able to teach in nature are the anti-nature laws.

Dekila Chungyalpa (49:07): I'm going to again, combine three questions. It was asked by Chris Egger, Kevin Riordan and Ali W. How does the economy of earthcare fit, or not fit, within capitalist systems? Or is it something that, as Herman Daly would argue, there isn't a place for earthcare within the capitalist portions and systems of our society? And is earthcare something that can occur at scale within our present systems? Or is it only possible if we reform them entirely?

Vandana Shiva ([49:38](#)): Well, you know earthcare means, our whole being in service for the earth as a living being. And that means I have to be intimate with the earth. Scale, of course matters, but the scale does not mean you get stuck. That's the illusion to get out [of]. If 100 trillion microbes can be in my gut, and run this amazing body, why can't we think of 100 trillion communities running the body of humanity and the earth? If we take our gut microbiome as the metaphor, then we will realize smallness is not a problem. Smallness in coordination and coherence is actually the solution. And many smalls build big. So the idea that small means, and local means you're stuck? No, many locals.

([50:29](#)) When I was addressing the Sri Lankan government today, part of what is growing is now people saying, not only individual farmers, but people are saying, "We're going to have bio-districts, organic districts." We have this in India, that's the movement I'm growing. We first trained farmers. Now we're saying we've got to have a region that is organic. And that's how everything living goes from the small to the big. That seed becomes the plant. And I don't think we should take constructs of the last 400 years, and try and force them to have a longer life. When their life is over, they fall dead like a leaf whose time is over.

Dekila Chungyalpa ([51:09](#)): We're almost out of time, but there's a question that's come up that honestly is also my question. It's come from Katherine and Erica. And the question is, "How do you not burn out, after so many years of activism?"

Vandana Shiva ([51:24](#)): I don't see myself as an internal combustion engine that's being run on fossil fuels. I see myself as part of an amazing energetic universe. And being part of that universe is the regeneration. So living life to fullness means your own energies are regenerative.

([51:45](#)) And I'll end with a word we use for our women farmers. The word is Shakti. The power to act. It's the name for women; it's the name for the feminine power. We all have the power to act. And if your reference point is not outside... If your reference point is money, power, politics, all of that, you will burn out. But if your reference point is the universe, and amazing regenerative systems, and you just say, "I'm part of you, I'm in service," why would you burn out?

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp ([52:24](#)): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker. Music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. Show notes and resources for this and other episodes can be found at podcast.mindandlife.org. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on iTunes and share it with a friend. If something in this conversation sparked insight for you, we'd love to know about it. You can send an email or voice memo to podcast.mindandlife.org. Mind & Life is a production of the Mind & Life Institute. Visit us at mindandlife.org where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action towards flourishing. There you can also support our work, including this podcast.*