



MIND & LIFE
I N S T I T U T E

Summer Research Institute 2021

Plenary Lecture: Vandana Shiva

Earth Democracy: Connecting the Rights of Mother Earth and the Well Being of All

Wednesday, June 9 (10:55 - 11:45 am)

Dekila Chungyalpa (00:15):

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to all of you who are joining us for this special livestream session of our six-day event, The Mind, the Human-Earth Connection, and the Climate Crisis of which we are now halfway through.

Dekila Chungyalpa (00:26):

If you're watching the free broadcast, you can find more information about the entire program and still sign up on our website to view live sessions and recordings. 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 program planning committee for Mind & Life this year.

Dekila Chungyalpa (00:59):

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 Te Jop which refers to the four sacred lakes that surround Madison.

Dekila Chungyalpa (01:13):

For those of you who are registered and able to join us for the morning meditation led by [Kira Joel 00:01:18], you might have ended at the moment where she talked about feeling a kinship to land and to species. And so I immediately went to the Himalayas, which is where I'm from. 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 and Madhya Pradesh in India.

Dekila Chungyalpa (01:43):

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.

Dekila Chungyalpa (02:05):

We are honored to have Dr. Shiva with us and I encourage you to read her full bio that can be found on the conference platform. 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, namaste, and I turn it over to you.

Vandana Shiva (02:35):

Dear Dekila, it's such a joy to be with you. It's a joy to be part of the Summer Institute in 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.

Vandana Shiva (02:56):

I'm grateful now because the large parts of my life that I had forgotten myself and they brought back all of those memories. So I'm grateful, very, very grateful to them. And when you talk about me being Monsanto's nightmare, I've just finished writing a promotional blurb for a very, very touching book on femicide, the killing of women. And it's inspired really by women who are having to fight to defend their lands and then they are the ones who are being raped and killed.

Vandana Shiva (03:33):

And it's come out of a dialogue that they've been having. And this indigenous woman says, "Why are our dreams their nightmares?" 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, other people's sacred.

Vandana Shiva (04:07):

And people think that that colonialism is over. But from the witnessing of amazing women who are turning their violence against them into courage to create a new world, you realized that the globalization might be at one level a new phenomenon. But it's an old phenomenon. It's the old phenomenon of colonialism.

Vandana Shiva (04:37):

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, but your mama gives us the guidance, every culture until the year 500 years ago, until Columbus.

Vandana Shiva (04:58):

And that rupture really is the disconnection between humans and the earth. 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 and infrastructure of ecocide in the mind.

Vandana Shiva (05:30):

And I'm saying this from the fact that you introduce 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 who sits behind me on my shelf and I sculpted him between my gap, between my MSc Honors and my going for the PhD, I did that sculpture of Einstein.

Vandana Shiva (05:57):

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. And so I learned non-separation through quantum theory as a discipline. But the philosophy on non-separation of as being part of the earth really comes from Chipko, and then all my engagements now over five decades with movements.

Vandana Shiva (06:34):

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 cause 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 to the city of Bhopal?

Vandana Shiva (07:01):

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. 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.

Vandana Shiva (07:33):

But I read them all. I read them all, and the structure of disconnection, the intellectual architecture of disconnection was laid in that period. But that period was also when on the one hand, people who continue to believe they were part of the earth, were defined as witches. Most of them were women. Nine million were killed in Europe, nine million.

Vandana Shiva (08:01):

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 two extremes together, the witch hunts and the witch hunts of the indigenous people because they were brought about forcing separation.

Vandana Shiva (08:20):

How dare you think that you're a 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 the 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."

Vandana Shiva (08:47):

Bacon said that we have to torture nature and make her our slave. Now, Bacon was the chancellor of England, was also in charge of the witch hunts. So he will bring in all his torture mechanisms into his thinking of science. And he wrote a book called A Masculine Birth of Time because the idea of a mother earth was a feminine idea and that had to be killed.

Vandana Shiva (09:19):

And then he drags 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. But then you have ... Most people don't realize how Cartesian our thinking has become. How everything is being reduced to measurement, quantification, size, weight.

Vandana Shiva (09:54):

Qualities have just gone, relationships have just gone. And that depth was shaped by Descartes who writes in his methods. He actually says, "I am a thinking mind." No, he said, "I'm a thinking thing." He can't say as a being, because you can't be. Being means to be alive. I'm a thinking thing without a body. Now, just imagine that. Just imagine.

Vandana Shiva (10:21):

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."

Vandana Shiva (10:51):

And sadly that period didn't just separate us from the earth. It separated the mind from body and created a very artificial idea 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.

Vandana Shiva (11:22):

James Lovelock called her Gaia when he realized that she creates her own systems of climate. He says 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 a cell to organisms to ecosystems, all the way to the planet, there is creativity, intelligence, consciousness pervading.

Vandana Shiva (11:55):

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 breath 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.

Vandana Shiva (12:20):

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 the indigenous people will totally relate to this because they had lived through it. We are still living through it and I think we all need to become much more conscious about it.

Vandana Shiva (12:47):

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 off their minds so that some privilege men could say, "We have mind and you're just bodies which we can exploit. You as women are mere bodies without minds, so you will be our slaves. The Africans whom you captured to work on the cotton fields are just bodies, and we will buy and sell you."

Vandana Shiva (13:19):

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 the 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 planet.

Vandana Shiva (13:46):

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 ...

Vandana Shiva (14:20):

We used to call it the greenhouse gas phenomena. And 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're having this impact.

Vandana Shiva (14:36):

It's when we move into the kind of more abstract language of climate change and into merely measuring the residues in the atmosphere that people got disconnected. 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.

Vandana Shiva (15:26):

So, greenhouse gas pollution is also very recent phenomena. If you think the human disconnection is a 500-year-old phenomena, the disconnection of ourselves from a living earth

as a web of life is only 200 years ago because until then we were living on biodiversity. We knew everything comes from plants.

Vandana Shiva (15:51):

And then we got the technologies and the power, or I should say we, the standard oil. It was Rockefeller who managed to control all the oil of the world and before that, the British with their coal. But all of the fossil fuels, coal, oil and now gas that's being fracked, have been fossilized by the earth out of living matter over 600 million years.

Vandana Shiva (16:22):

And now, we see, 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 according to the sacred geographies. And we put lines everywhere to create empires of carbon just like in the earlier time.

Vandana Shiva (16:58):

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 so we'll divide it this way amongst us.

Vandana Shiva (17:26):

And then they left everyone fighting everyone else. So, carbon has created wars. Dead carbon has created wars. I'll also say dead carbon has fossilized our minds into that very mechanistic thinking. And this just 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.

Vandana Shiva (18:04):

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.

Vandana Shiva (18:24):

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 ... discussion.

Vandana Shiva (18:54):

And because we've destroyed biodiversity from doing its work and shifted to fossil fuel based climate change, we have had 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're 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.

Vandana Shiva (19:25):

Oil whether it is the embodied oil or the packaging in the plastic or the long distance food miles ... Well, let me give you the figures. 11% to 15% emissions come from the way we produce with nitrogen fertilizers, heavy machinery, destroying small farms which produced 80% of food. 80% of the food doesn't come from these large farms.

Vandana Shiva (19:51):

And these large farms are so hungry for profit, they don't know when to stop. So they invade the Amazon for GMO soil. Most of it goes for biofuel and animal feed. But it's their invasions into the forest that are behind the COVID and the corona and the SARS and the Ebolas and the HIVs. The last frontiers of globalization which is the globalization of greed has created new epidemics, but it has also created disease, the chronic diseases.

Vandana Shiva (20:20):

So this invasion into forest, let's call it land use change, not 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 who are left with nothing are giving us 80% of the food.

Vandana Shiva (20:43):

Indigenous people who've been left with no land are giving us 80% conservational 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 my mastery.

Vandana Shiva (21:04):

And then we did good food, which we could eat fresh, local, biodiverse, organic and messed it up and turn it into ultra-processed food, which is 75% of the chronic diseases. Monsanto doesn't exist anymore. It was brought 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.

Vandana Shiva (21:40):

See food as sacred. See us as embodiment of food. So if food is hyper processed, transported, packaged, Amazon grows free 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 ecommerce distribution system, already 15% to 20%.

Vandana Shiva (22:15):

Waste is 4%. We are talking 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 meeting

again, Bill Gates, my ideal friend Bill Gates. He thinks the problem is the cows. Just like he also thinks the problem is the sun.

Vandana Shiva (22:35):

So this disconnected mind takes nature, and says, "You're the problem. You're the problem, and I have to discipline you even more. Google has a new line 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 in the midst of this awakening of humanity, to a living earth, a living consciousness, human beings who are conscious beings.

Vandana Shiva (23:03):

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 recognized apartheid, separation, the violence it did to South Africa. But an ecological apartheid leads to human apartheid and results hunger; results hunger for a very wasteful economy.

Vandana Shiva (23:32):

How do we correct this? We correct it by realizing, hey, 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 vasudhaiva kutumbakam.

Vandana Shiva (23:56):

Earth democracy for me is just recognizing that, recognizing that the earth is alive and we are a part of her living systems. And our interconnectedness with each other makes us a family. There are no hierarchies in that democracy. They cannot be because we are all not just 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.

Vandana Shiva (24:27):

A, we are earth beings. And as earth beings, we are not atomistic, we are not separate. We are not insulated. We are inter-beings. 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.

Vandana Shiva (25:02):

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 scientist, who says, we were 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 realized it's the messing up of the gut, the gut microbiome.

Vandana Shiva (25:39):

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 the 50 to 100 million nerve cells in our gut and that's why it's called the enteric nervous system.

Vandana Shiva (26:14):

There's a nervous system here but the gut is playing such a big role. And as you go deeper into this distributed intelligence through our body, the connection of our distributed intelligence as one intelligence with the intelligences of the earth, we realized that we have a huge potential to make a change.

Vandana Shiva (26:40):

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 earth care, 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. Earth care becomes care for human beings.

Vandana Shiva (27:05):

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.

Vandana Shiva (27:41):

But how much good it could do, my work shows me that we could get rid of climate change in 10 years. A, we have to stop the greenhouse gas emissions. We've got to stop fossil fuels. We can go to net zero trick. We got to absolute zero. But while we do that, we've got to bring the life back to the earth.

Vandana Shiva (27:59):

And that is our work of growing food. 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.

Vandana Shiva (28:36):

These metabolic disorders will only be healed when we see the wholeness. And when we recognize in the wholeness, that there's 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.

Vandana Shiva (28:56):

My work on quantum theory thought me how the whole world is really one massive quantum coherence, and that's not what non-separation is. And if physics has woken us to the quantum coherent universal interconnectedness, and ecology has woken us to the quantum coherence of biological and ecological interconnectedness, spiritual traditions are more restored as that, is it a time to put the petty games of petty minds aside and find the power to not let the destructive games carry on? Because they are playing games, like kids who never grew up.

Vandana Shiva (29:36):

For them, the earth is a Lego set. You engineer a climate, you engineer your genes and I really see you never grew up out of your playing with toys. Grow up. Grow up and be part of the sacred universe. It's a joy. Thank you.

Dekila Chungyalpa (29:52):

Thank you so much. That was so incredibly powerful. I think we all need just a few deep breaths to take it all in. All of that wisdom was amazing.

Vandana Shiva (30:03):

And I'll have my [inaudible 00:30:04].

Dekila Chungyalpa (30:08):

I'm sure I speak for everyone to say that there were just so many things you said that resounded, 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 in the earth and what we're seeing in community as well.

Dekila Chungyalpa (30:33):

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. Our team has been busy capturing your questions entered through chat throughout this presentation. And we invite you to continue typing questions there. If you would like to voice a question, please use the raise hand feature in Zoom and you may be selected to voice your question directly.

Dekila Chungyalpa (30:59):

For those of you who are joining through the Speaker Series, note that you have the opportunity to discuss this session on the conference platform located within the sessions tab. So, with no further ado, let's go into the questions. We have so many.

Dekila Chungyalpa (31:16):

The first question that's come in is from Rachel Gould and what she asks is, "Your point about how Cartesian thinking has become so crucial. Could you speak to how you think the core mission of Mind & Life which is perhaps described as integrating, contemplative and scientific traditions can help to bring us into a new way of thinking?"

Vandana Shiva (31:45):

The Cartesian paradigm in 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.

Vandana Shiva (32:23):

And to connect it back to my opening remarks on colonization, there was a British 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 now, we are going through the ultimate quantification right now. Everything we are seeing is being quantified into tiny little bits of data. And then that's being communicated.

Vandana Shiva (32:55):

This is part of what we need to be reflecting on, the ontological reality that is shaping. So, how can Mind & Life address this? Like I said, I quoted many, many, many of the scientists. 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.

Vandana Shiva (33:29):

But so many scientists are working on this. And all the spiritual traditions have told us, "Listen, what we have to do is get the dust off so much of what are traditions were." Why will we, for 10,000, 20,000 years stable societies, ecologically stable? Because why we live by this moral law of the earth that we cannot violate.

Vandana Shiva (33:59):

And that's what sustainability is. Non-sustainability is, "I want to trample her. She's dead. She's my property, and there's no consequence." So, both spiritual traditions and science are coming. They accept 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, it makes you fake science. So, there's a lot of fake science going around.

Vandana Shiva (34:25):

And I have lived through it with the GMO debates and the Monsanto's, me being Monsanto's nightmares because I just stuck my truth. I just stuck 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 seek how things work, not in the service of what I call moneymaking.

Dekila Chungyalpa (34:55):

That's so wonderful, so powerful, speaking true to power. We have a question from Beth Blissman. And I can see your hand is up, Beth. Would you just directly ask the question to Vandanaji?

Beth Blissman (35:09):

Yes. Thank you. Can you hear me okay?

Vandana Shiva (35:12):

Yes, of course. How are you?

Beth Blissman (35:15):

I'm doing well, Vandana. It's so good to see you here. Thank you so much for your work and please give my love to your sister, Mira. 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's seemed to be so many in our country who don't yet understand how patriarchy harms them as well and many farmer actually that I worked with.

Beth Blissman (35:55):

I'm in the state of Ohio and near a rural area. What are your best strategies for working with men in that current setting to bring them to an understanding or at least along closer 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 (36:21):

What I've learned over these many years is those who have enjoyed a position of power and treated as natural, as the natural order of things, it somewhat shows how artificially constructed it is and appalled my 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.

Vandana Shiva (37:15):

Let me just mention, Dekila, for people who want to have more of these kind of issues, we offer a course in October. I call it now Return to the Earth, but it has 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, all the different ways of composting, living food, how food itself is the currency of life.

Vandana Shiva (37:50):

About food and health, and food and nutrition, we have amazing team of doctors who work on it because this is what's troubling people with the COVID, the lockdown, economy collapsing for

the poor and increasing for the rich. The poor have lost 3.7 trillion. When I say poor, it's the working people everywhere, so 3.7 trillion evaporated; 3.9 trillion more money made by the billionaires.

Vandana Shiva (38:18):

So, the economy of food has to be a place we return 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. Having a baby, 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.

Vandana Shiva (39:04):

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 can make hateful hierarchies can be turned into joyful horizontalities.

Dekila Chungyalpa (39:42):

That was just marvelous. I can see people are putting in links to the course that Vandana mentioned. And I'm sure our Mind & Life team will do the same. I'm going to move to our next question. It looks like we have a couple of questions that are ... 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 asks what your definition of the sacred is. And in relation to that, Pooja Sahni has asked what are practical steps to bring this awareness of sacredness to youth in particular today.

Vandana Shiva (40:21):

For me, sacredness is that which is not violable, inviolable. And that means you recognize the intrinsic work, 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, bioethical 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.

Vandana Shiva (40:59):

Well, the beauty is nature does it all the time. Nature does it all the time. It constantly creates more space for the other and does not take space. That I think is the learning from nature. My quantum theory taught me non-separation, but it what could not teach me is the living processes and what I'm now waking up to is 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.

Vandana Shiva (41:34):

And that's what soil organisms do. That's what the seed does. I've got a seed sitting 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 it I can sow again.

Vandana Shiva (41:54):

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 (42:21):

So beautiful, thank you so much. I'm learning so much as I'm trying to moderate at the same time. 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 our 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 (42:50):

Hi, thank you very much, Vandana. Thank you very much. My question is, well, I'm from Colombia, 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 peasants, the 20% you talked about, part of the market, part of their production chains, and cities seemed to be like far away from the debate, far away from all these turmoil.

Victor (43:36):

And my question is how do you bring this connection, sacred connection, from the level of consciousness in 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 the nature? Thank you.

Vandana Shiva (44:10):

My computer is saying you've got to close down Zoom soon because it's getting too heated, my poor computer. It's hot in India. If suddenly something happens, it's the machine that let you down and not me. I'll be with you.

Vandana Shiva (44:22):

I think part of the 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 are getting. The more they're billed for paying, health bill is increasing.

Vandana Shiva (44:49):

So, the connection has to be through food, but food and health. And that everyone wakes up to the fact that we need to eat well. If you should eat well, you'd better reconnect to the farmer who's taking care of the earth. Your reconnection then allows the farmer to also stay on the land and that's why I say conscious eating is called 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.

Vandana Shiva (45:24):

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. Sri Lankan government had said, "We are going to go 100% organic." They ban chemical imports, a country, a whole country. I work with seven states and my country, Sikkim. Dekila is from Sikkim. I've worked with the chief minister there to make Sikkim an organic state. It doesn't always work to 100%, but I'd rather have 100% commitment and maybe 1% missed failure than 100% commitment to spread disease and poisons.

Dekila Chungyalpa (46:06):

Next, we have a question from Mathias who is 10 years old, who is in Brazil. And he is joining from the Speaker Series. His question is, "What can we as the young generation do to help all of us and mother earth?"

Vandana Shiva (46:26):

Love. First, become aware that she is your mother. And 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. I'll say, "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 told myself. I started to reach out to farmers. I started to farm now.

Vandana Shiva (47:02):

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 and distressed and COVIDs and coronas to being gardens of health, gardens of hope, gardens of happiness.

Dekila Chungyalpa (47:32):

I know you have spent five decades, I won't say fighting but regenerating a revolution 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 is a series of questions actually around this issue of inequity. And I'm going to read one of them.

Dekila Chungyalpa (47:54):

Sarah McKay 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 wellbeing who currently have the most influence."

Vandana Shiva (48:25):

I think when I talk about earth democracy and us being 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.

Vandana Shiva (49:02):

And those many kinds of power then have to be cultivated. They don't just happen. 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. You have to cultivate.

Vandana Shiva (49:23):

And I am such a dedicated believer in diversity at every level, in biodiversity, in cultural diversity, diversity of intelligences, any diversity of political strategies. And that means that different people are effective in different alliances. It also means in different times in particular societies' histories, different things about ... I've written most of the laws related to biodiversity in my country, but there's windows when there are enlightened governments like right now in Sri Lanka. There's a government that says we go organic.

Vandana Shiva (50:04):

If doors are open, you work with them. I was working with the Kerala government the other day. When doors are open, you work with them. When doors are close, you work wherever there is an opening. But I would never 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. That's what 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 (50:51):

I'm going to turn to people who have their hands up so they can directly ask. Clarissa, would you like to ask your question directly?

Clarissa (50:59):

Thank you so much. This is such an incredible wellspring of wisdom, I would just say. So my question is, as an educator, I am aware that we perpetuate the systems of disconnection. I think our children come into our K-12 settings. Young children are very connected to the earth already. They're connected to each other. They have that depth of interconnection, and then in

at least in the west and I'm assuming that we've sent our wonderful systems in so many places, that that disconnection starts in our educational system.

Clarissa (51:38):

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 systems? I think that's where it grows. I feel like that's a leverage point. So, if you could speak to that. Thank you so much.

Vandana Shiva (51:57):

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 their 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 the garden, taking a walk in the forest or a park, and through that ... I've done this work with schools in India. I can teach them math. I can teach them biology. I can teach them geography. Everything is there for you to teach.

Vandana Shiva (52:41):

The idea that there are certain disciplines that are only in the books can be taught is ignoring the fact that every discipline has an illustration and an example in living systems, except the wrong ... The only thing that you wouldn't be able to teach in nature are the anti-nature laws.

Dekila Chungyalpa (53:03):

I'm going to again combine three questions. It was asked Chris Eger, Kevin Brierdene, and Ally Dupleau. How does the economy of earth care fit or not fit within capitalist systems? Or is it something that as Herman Daly would argue, there isn't a place for earth care within the capitalist portions and systems across society? And is earth care something that can occur at scale within our present systems or is it only possible if we reform them entirely?

Vandana Shiva (53:36):

Earth care, it means, I said our whole being in service for the earth as a living being. And that means I have to be intimate with the earth. So, scale, of course, matches but the scale does not mean you get stuck. That's the illusion we've got out to get out. If a hundred trillion microbes can be in my gut and run this amazing body, why can't we think of a hundred trillion communities running the body of humanity in the earth? If we take our gut microbiome as the metaphor, then we will realize smallness is not a problem. Smallness and coordination and coherence is actually the solution.

Vandana Shiva (54:20):

And many smalls make big, so the idea that small means and local means you're stuck, no. Many locals, 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 they're going to have bio-districts, organic districts. We have this in India. That's the movement I'm growing. We first train farmers, now we're seeing we got to have a region that is organic.

Vandana Shiva (54:46):

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 (55:10):

That was so beautiful. 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 Kathryn and Erika. And the question is, "How do you not burn out after so many years of activism?"

Vandana Shiva (55:26):

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 and I'll end with the 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.

Vandana Shiva (55:59):

And if your reference point is not outside, your reference point is money, power, check, 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?

Dekila Chungyalpa (56:20):

Thank you so much, Vandana, that was just incredible, so much wisdom in there. I just want to say [foreign language 00:56:26] from my side and from Mind & Life for sharing your wisdom with us. I know there are so many questions we didn't get to. I'm so sorry that we couldn't get to all of them but we're out of time. I hope you stay back and engage as you've done in the last two days.

Dekila Chungyalpa (56:44):

And to those of you who joined to our public free livestream, thank you for joining and getting a taste of our Human-Earth Connection event. If you would like access to all of the other sessions including the recordings of sessions from earlier in the week, registration is still open. Our next session, Mindfulness Co-Benefits and Behavioral Eco-Wellness with Dr. Bruce Barrett begins in about 15 minutes.

Dekila Chungyalpa (57:06):

As is our practice with all plenary and panel sessions, if you are joining as a Summer Research Institute participant on this live Zoom, you're welcome to hang out a bit longer to discuss this session with each other in small breakout groups. That opportunity will begin following this SlideShare. Just hang in here in Zoom.

Dekila Chungyalpa (57:24):

For the rest of you, thank you again and see you at the next session.