

Kerri: Katie, Welcome to the podcast.

Katie: Thanks so much, Kerri.

Kerri: Thank you for being here and being in conversation with us.

Katie: Thanks for coming.

Kerri: Gosh, I admire your work so much. One of the things I've really appreciated about you as I've witnessed you over the years, is how organically you embody the way in which you throw down so fiercely around justice and around activism, and are invested so fiercely in Buddhist practice and in the being-ness. I love that just because I know not a lot of people understand that relationship, and that intersection. Not only do you understand it, but you really stand at that intersection. Have you always understood the interplay between justice and meditation? Or did that evolve gradually for you?

Katie: Thank you. Yeah. Yeah. I did not always understand that interplay. I think ferocity was my first language. I grew up with a feminist mom who taught me a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.

Kerri: That's awesome.

Katie: I was constantly fighting for reproductive justice and fighting against a lot of religious fundamentalists. I grew up with a father who was also fighting for justice in his own way. Well, he was a black judge at the time when that was still relatively rare. Justice was really in my blood, in my family. I'd almost to channel this rage about discrimination, injustice, homophobia and sexism in my school. I started fighting that from a pretty young age, and it felt good. It felt aligned with long and deep traditions of fighting against oppression, of fighting for freedom, equality, liberation.

Katie: At the same time, I was what I now call an arrogant atheist. I just like, "Yeah. This is all that needs to happen, is we got to fight for justice, and treat each other well and be kind." Religion is like a thing that people add on top if they need something else to believe in. I saw this kind of a culture, just an invention. It wasn't until I finished college, and stumbled upon some meditation teachings and eventually went to a meditation center that I first had that experience of the mashup of my righteous rage with the wisdom that these teachings were offering. It was actually this really petty personal experience where I lived within walking distance of the meditation center I was going to.

Katie: I would go to the 6:45am sets and one morning I got an email from a lover, from someone I was dating, that described some criticisms about me. I was really annoyed and upset and further annoyed because I was like, "I didn't know this email is going to ruin my meditation in the morning. I'm going to be just pissed the whole time. I won't be able to focus on my breath." I stomped over the meditation center, really pissed, really mad and had a very distracted sit, stopped on my way back home, still not. Then suddenly, I could hear these other feelings that were simultaneously happening. It's what I've come to think of as the quieter instruments. Like when you're listening to a

song, and the melody is maybe in the foreground, or the singing. But then you can train yourself to listen to the bass or the drums or the quieter things in the background.

Kerri: You can hear more.

Katie: Right. Although the anger was still the primary sound, the loudest sound, I could suddenly hear, like, "Oh, I actually feel really grateful that this person would take the time to share this with me, and I'm curious. Oh, does this match what other people have shared about me?" There's this still quiet, but really expansive feeling. That's when I knew like, "Oh, wow, this is real. This is very real." These whisper practices are alerting me to parts of life in reality that I just had been drowned out by my own righteousness and anger.

Kerri: Did those feelings feel in conflict to you?

Katie: At that moment, I saw how they could coexist. Then that, I think, guided my activism thereafter. Because I knew or I have felt that our activism never has to be one note. It can always be so complex, so rich with this orchestra of feelings. That's the type of activism that I feel inspired by. It brings me alive, and I think the stuff that you do, and the type that we're trying to promote in the world, it's like this. It feels really holistic, really multi-dimensional.

Kerri: Yet one note is what we're taught. Right?

Katie: Yeah.

Kerri: Because I'm just thinking about how much activism exists without contemplative practice, without inquiry, and interrogation and curiosity is what I heard you're describing. Also, so much contemplative practice exists without activism and yoga. We see so much of that and how we're taught binary by culture. That it's either one, or the other. Because to hold those things together is messy and often contradictory. I find it to be more challenge. I mean, more rewarding for sure and more challenging.

Katie: Yeah. Absolutely. Of course, I was really also irritated and frustrated at some of my first, my initial experiences with even engaged Buddhism. I would see advertised these engaged Buddhist retreats that were thousands of dollars, and I was like, "Who can afford to do this?" You know what I mean? That would really have a heavy emphasis on this acceptance and like, "Don't resist reality, just Inquire. Just inquire. Just be curious." I was like, "This feels really unsafe to me and this feels really-"

Kerri: And untrue.

Katie: Yeah. And also kind of unkind or I don't know.

Kerri: And certainly uninclusive. Right?

Katie: Right.

Kerri: The amount meant \$5,000 retreats to find yourself and do good in the world, and how we're selling that. We're often framing, "Come to this retreat and be the change maker you need to be in the world." It doesn't include a consideration for people who can't afford that.

Katie: Right.

Kerri: Certainly not a consideration for structural racism and systemic oppression. Then it doesn't also include a systemic analysis of how we're even here, why we even need change.

Katie: Exactly.

Kerri: It's funny because it's harmful, and it's just so limiting.

Katie: Luckily I think it's evolving. We're not doomed to say that forever.

Kerri: Wait, this is the end of the podcast. Good luck you all.

Katie: It's actually pretty heart-warming, I think, to see how influences like Pleasure Activism from Adrienne Maree Brown.

Kerri: Yes. Radical Dharma.

Katie: Radical Dharma. Yeah. Just the openness increasingly to understanding that, yeah, one-dimensional pressure politics can be more and commodified spirituality can be more. It's fine if we're attracted to those initially. That's what was available to me.

Kerri: It might be like a point of entry.

Katie: Exactly. Yeah. But then at some point, some of us find ourselves longing to really combine them or wrestle with these paradoxes of, "Well, Buddha Dharma, the wisdom of the Buddha's teaching me, suffering comes when I resist reality. But then my political community is teaching me to resist. What's going on? That's how we're going to survive or how we're going to win. What do I do with that?"

Kerri: Therein lies the practice. I was in conversation with someone recently, Michelle Cassandra Johnson. You might know her. We were talking about enough-ness and how society, especially the wellness industrial complex is trying to sell us, "You're not enough, so buy all these things." There's a reclaiming of, "I'm enough." Even that's limiting. Because I think we can be committed to radical self-acceptance around, "I'm enough, and I'm whole already." Also be pushing ourselves around, "Where can I be better? Where is it not enough, in fact." I just think that too is one of those mind blown paradoxical practices where it can be both of those things at the same time. This is where the spiritual practice, I think, really comes in for me like, "How do I hold seemingly opposites simultaneously?"

Katie: That was Suzuki Roshi. He said to his students, "You're perfect just as you are, and you could use a little improvement."

Kerri: That's right. I love that.

Katie: Yeah. I think there's this other part, also it's not perfect as I am and need to improve is also, what is I? What is this I that I'm referring to that is either enough just as it is or needs some improvement? That place of inquiry also is so mind blowing and so it has been so fruitful for me of like, "Oh, wow, there's shit. There's a whole other dimension of questioning the separate self, questioning the separate self."

Kerri: That's right. The small self.

Katie: Yeah.

Kerri: The analysis that I've learned around that is how that has really come from the culture of individualism. And how that too has been weaponized by culture and by systems. So that we believe we separate, and therefore we won't organize or therefore we won't, right? And how that's one of those other things that we need to unlearn.

Katie: Yeah. It's beautiful. Thich Nhat Hanh is a huge inspiration for Buddhist Peace Fellowship and has been since the '70s. For listeners, I don't know if you're familiar with Thich Nhat Hanh, but he's a Vietnamese Zen Master who was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr for a Nobel Peace Prize. They were contemporaries. He really live and continues to live his life embodying these paradoxes. He will say things like, "Never choose sides and always resist injustice." It's like, "How could we possibly do that?" He was exiled from Vietnam for refusing to take sides in the American War, the Vietnam War.

Katie: I think about, when we talk about individualism, I mean, the US context is so hyper individualistic. But that's not true in all places where Buddhism exists and has existed. How can we learn from what are in some ways like our spiritual elder societies? How they are living, and self-governing and working together around the pain of the separate self. Thich Nhat Hanh is definitely a huge inspiration for me, for that kind of surprisingly so, because I used to a little bit write him off. This is a terrible admission, publicly.

Kerri: Confessions.

Katie: Yeah. He wasn't, like honestly, I wanted more confrontation than what he seemed to be proposing. This is maybe, I don't know, eight or 10 years ago. I think I've since come back to him, and I have a whole new level of appreciation and respect for his teaching and his practice. But also, as far as medicine against hyper individualism, I'm thinking about Thailand and parts of Cambodia, Southeast Asia. Quick shout out. Ajahn Chah in the Thai forest tradition is one of the big forerunners of the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center where I first started learning and studying, Buddha Dharma aside.

Katie: I just feel like it's important to name some of the people that have held the lineages. I'm not a teacher, I'm not a Buddhist teacher, but I'm just a student, and a learner, and a lover of seeking. Ajahn Chah and the Thai forest tradition and Sayagyi U Ba Khin and the Burmese tradition. I also studied in the [Goan-koji 00:14:03] centers that are free, by donation only. Centers all around the world that were a real refreshing counterpoint, actually, for me.

Katie: They're not perfect by any means, but they're entirely donation based and because their teachings are pre-recorded, a lot of the evening discourses are pre-recorded. They can be translated into every language. It was some of the most multilingual, multiethnic-

Kerri: Accessible.

Katie: ... accessible Dharma that ever attended. Shout out to that. Your passionate centers. Then recently, I've been inquiring and studying in a Rinzai Zen tradition that comes through Stanley Tanaoroshi and Omori Sogen, and it's now being carried on in the US. Anyway, Thank you for giving me-

Kerri: The context.

Katie: Yeah. I just give gratitude to these lineages because it is also such a US tendency to want to glorify the new or reinvent and not actually give honor and an homage to the lineages. That's also a way that we can resist the hyper-individualism. Is by understanding we're just parts of these deep, deep lineages across time.

Kerri: It also I think helps us take responsibility for the taking. We have a culture of taking and appropriating what's not ours, especially when we don't acknowledge and give reverence to where they came from.

Katie: So happy to be trying to unlearn some of that.

Kerri: Thank you, for that.

Katie: And again, imperfect, but we're moving. We're moving and changing.

Kerri: Yeah. We're evolving. We're in transition.

Katie: Impermanence.

Kerri: You were saying, and I forget the quote that you said around, "I won't take sides, but-"

Katie: But I'll resist injustice

Kerri: But I'll resist injustice, and it just makes me think about what's happening in our country right now and the divisiveness. I hear often a lot of the response to that is like, it's common ground. Can we all just get along? Let's not take sides. This idea that we can be

neutral. This illusion that neutrality is possible, and how harmful that is, and the way in which it erases people's experiences and it upholds injustice. What is the teaching for us there around how we acknowledge, non-neutral and navigate, like not perpetuating divisiveness and separation. But also resisting when things are wrong and not okay.

Katie: To me, what's coming up is commitment and patience together. What happens if I refuse to accept a false or hateful story about me? I also have to go in and smash it right this moment.

Kerri: That hammer.

Katie: Yeah. That's definitely my original instinct.

Kerri: Your ferocity, as you named it. I so related to you in that moment, I was like, "Yeah. It's ferociousness."

Katie: Yeah. It's understandable why because so much human cruelty and oppressive systems and colonization and all this junk has been heaped onto people, and land and non-human beings. There's this instinct to just shake it off as quickly as possible and neutralize the threat. I've been thinking a lot about that and in context of Christian hegemony, also in this country, and the good versus evil and a judgmental God. That's like, "Oh, there's something about the story of, you can't be neutral. You have to choose sides because God's going to judge you and based on which side you choose."

Katie: To a certain extent, I think it's useful in our movements, but I'm a little bit worried that we might over invest in that sense of urgency and duality. And I wonder what's possible in a non-dual patient committed steady, like irrepressible. What's the difference between pressure politics and irrepressible politics? Which is like the patience of the ocean that just erodes the cliff side.

Kerri: Like the sustained push.

Katie: Yeah.

Kerri: It's not even palpable, but it's like nonstop pressure. As an analogy, for how we keep going.

Katie: Because I think if we're taught that the only way we can demonstrate our commitment is by smashing the opposition in the moment, then, do we lose all kinds of other creative resistance, opportunities, and tactics? I'll give an example. It's an example of where an imbalance towards the polarization can cause us to forfeit things that are important to us. Recently, I was attending an action by a group of young environmentalists that were pressuring the DNC, the Democratic National Convention, to try to get them to adopt a climate debate for the presidential candidates.

Katie: These young people were really hyped, met at a nearby fast food place to review the roles and if certain things don't get voted on correctly, we're going to start singing and

shouting and moving in this way. Then we go over to the Hotel Convention Center. It's this big hall and there are many rows of chairs set up for the audience and there's a you of the DNC representatives.

Katie: People take their seats, and more and more people keep streaming in later. There are more people than there are chairs. I can feel it's like this palpable laser focus from the environmentalist, these young environmentalists at the front of the room, at the target, at the people that they're trying to push and move with the pressure politics. This laser focus is ignoring the fact that there are elders now in the room who don't have a chair to sit in. You know what I mean? It's like, the environmental movement to me is about loving and honoring the sacredness of all life and about recovering and reclaiming a lot of these. Just the fecundity and sacredness of earth that is flattened and killed off by ecocidal white supremacist settler colonials that are patriarchy. Yet we're not aware of what's happening.

Katie: Finally, I just made an announcement to the room like, "Hey, you all. Some people don't have enough chairs to sit in, so those of us who can stand, can we get up and make room for people who might need to sit." Which could be based on age, but could be based on all kinds of invisible disabilities or whatever. It was good, then we moved, and the group found its equilibrium again. I'm really excited to see more and more, hopefully in our movements. Both being able to take on the compassionate confrontation is like the challenge of the so called opposition. Also this expanded awareness of, "Who are we? Where are we? How do we conduct ourselves?" To me, that's where mindful awareness practice and training, absolutely is indispensable to the political work.

Kerri: Especially when we're trying to do a lot of things at once. For me, it's when the cost is relationship and human dignity, it's too high. It's just too high and we forget who we are. I want to talk more about this nuanced, holistic approach to change making that you keep talking about. You have this framework called Build Block Be, which you defined as a framework describing the essential qualities for true social and spiritual transformation. I believe it's based on the three dimensions that come out of Joanna Macy's work around the Great Turning.

Katie: Well, they're very similar. Joanna and I actually, and the BPF staff, we all sat down and have a conversation recently and explored whether there might be similarities and differences.

Kerri: Oh, nice.

Katie: Yeah. She was amazing. Joanna Macy, the Great Turning, so good.

Kerri: It's a demonstration of how healthy frameworks are alike. Human frameworks emerge from different places and have a lot in common. And also a lot that's different based on who's emerging, who's originating them.

Katie: Yeah. Definitely. Block Build Be, I think of it almost as this like-

Kerri: Is it Block Build Be? I'm calling it Build Block Be.

Katie: It doesn't really matter. It doesn't really matter. I like to do-

Kerri: Is there a sequence?

Katie: It's a good question. I like to do Block Build Be. It might be a bias because I started out with Block.

Kerri: Nice. And I resonated with Block, too. We talked about this.

Katie: Let's not downplay the Block here. I think it almost is this methodological poem. It just came to me one day in the BPF office here where we are. It's like, "Okay. Block Build Be. Yeah. Because things like, Yes! Magazine, and these are great counterbalances to all the negative, are really awesome, I think for helping balance out the Block and the build, like the no and the yes. I was like, we are at a Buddhist Peace Fellowship, this spiritual political constellation of people, and being is like, should be in there. You know what I mean? Block Build Be, okay, yeah, how can we block oppression and harm, structural harm? Build inspiring solutions for the things we want to see in the world and be in alignment with our highest truths? And in alignment with that part of ourselves that wants to notice who else is in the room, and we hear the quieter instruments.

Kerri: All of these things can coexist at the same time.

Katie: I hope so.

Kerri: Sometimes certain parts, certain components lead. Based on what the need is and what the, so it's nuanced, and it's responsive. It allows different people to contribute also in unique authentic ways, what feels true to them. It makes room for everybody's gifts.

Katie: Often when we speak this poem aloud, the Black Build Be poem, I really see people just relaxed, almost like full body sigh like, "Oh, yeah." Yeah, because either it's like, "Oh. Things other than blocking can be important and that's great." Or, "Oh, well, maybe I don't have to block all the time. Maybe I can take a break because I know my comrades and cousins over there, holding that part down." Maybe actually what I'm doing over here being, which feels like treason or abdication of my responsibility. I can find ways to reintegrate it and re-harmonize it with the blocking and the building that are going on.

Kerri: That feels so important, especially I feel in movement culture, where we aspire to be weaving, and interconnected and collaborative. And yet, of course, we exist in a culture that buys into scarcity where that breeds competition. That also reinforces individualism that our organization or our Block or Build or Be is the only solution for the part. It's Like, "Oh, no. We have all of us." I don't have to do everything. It really disrupts that mentality. It's comforting. Not a bad comfort, but like "I'm confident to know that there are other people in the ecosystem." There's a lot of us doing different kinds of work that all of it is necessary in different ways.

Katie: Absolutely. There are cultures, I think, especially indigenous cultures, and we saw this at Standing Rock and I really see it here in the Sogorea Te Land Trust and Ohlone Groups that are protecting sacred sites and reviving language and culture. It's like, for some folks the being never left. The ceremony at the center of protection and not protesting, but protecting was such a huge contribution, I think, of the Standing Rock communication.

Kerri: Yeah, that's what I was thinking of, too.

Katie: You can feel how the being connects with protecting, in some ways a bit more than protesting.

Kerri: Is that about interdependence like just a deep understanding of not separateness. That we are earth, we are the land, this is us.

Katie: I can't really speak for traditions that I don't come from. Again, with Thich Nhat Hanh, he coined the term inter-being. In the Buddhist tradition, there's this really incredibly radical and sometimes honestly terrifying level on which we are not separate from each other. From the trees that are providing us air to breathe, from oceans, and the air, and space and everything that has ever been and ever will be.

Katie: It can easily be diluted into "all lives matter" in that way of horrible denial of the truths of the delusions of hierarchy and supremacy that are very violent. What if we could recuperate and reclaim more of us, I'm saying. Because some people already are doing it, but what if more of us could bring that sense of secret interconnection, and the courage that comes from that, and the love that comes from that to our movements or to ourselves who are in movement?

Kerri: Well, I hear you again naming the nuance. Because what you just, all lives matter reminds me of, that we are one. We love to say we are one in contemplative yoga wellness practice. It's not to deny. Of course, we are. Like capital AND, like AND, it's also true that we're all having a very different experience of being live on the planet. Given how things are organized, given systems of oppression, given who gets rewarded, given white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, colonization. I mean, the list goes on. To me, that goes back to spiritual practice, how do we actually hold the both hands? Because of course, there's truth in inter-being and oneness, but that's not the whole story.

Katie: The Buddhist first noble truth was, there is suffering. That means for all of us. I sometimes reflect on how suffering is universal, but oppression is patent. It's specific.

Kerri: It's a whole other thing.

Katie: We shouldn't conflate them. It's okay for me to recognize that someone who might be in a more privileged position might also be suffering intensely, extremely. Partly because of a feeling of separation.

Kerri: That doesn't mean that systems are organized against them.

Katie: Exactly.

Kerri: And that's oppression.

Katie: Right.

Kerri: That's oppression. Let's talk about Block, since you and I started there.

Katie: Let's do it.

Kerri: I just want to ask about civil disobedience, because this is another thing you and I have in common. It's a willingness to put our bodies on the line. I wish you could talk to the relationship between civil disobedience and nonviolent action, and Buddhism. Because it actually has a long history.

Katie: Well, it feels maybe fruitful to even start by acknowledging that at the time of the Buddha, he was opposing a caste system structure that said, "Only certain people can achieve enlightenment in this lifetime."

Kerri: It sounds familiar.

Katie: By teaching that all beings in this very lifetime and particularly with an auspicious, the ability to be born a human and to both have the capacity to hear and understand the Dharma and enough discomfort in life to act on it. That all of us can find awakening. This earned him enemies. You know what I mean? It was not uncontroversial. I think that's one example of a nonviolent change to the dominant system.

Katie: From there, as I mentioned, Thich Nhat Hanh is an incredible, just, I don't know, lineage holder vessel. I was reading in Being Peace. He describes seven stages of reconciliation. In our context when a lot of us are working on restorative justice, we're trying to abolish the prison-industrial complex and trying to find ways of addressing harm and repairing harm that are not punitive, that are not based on this course role capitalism. Thich Nhat Hanh is like, "Here are seven stages for reconciliation." And they're amazing. They're so amazing.

Kerri: They already exist.

Katie: They've existed for a really long ass time.

Kerri: We keep recreating. We're trying to make things up when actually, we can look to history and to our teachers.

Katie: Totally acknowledging that for some of us. Our lineages have been severed in really traumatic ways. As folks captured from Africa and slaves, forced into assimilation through boarding schools, forced to flee our homelands. Many reasons that we might forget or not had access.

Kerri: Or not know.

Katie: Right, to traditions. Really wanting to acknowledge and hold the difficulty of that. What I was so struck by the seven stages of reconciliation is that part of them are premised on, we have a community that lives together day-to-day, and reminds each other to practice mindfulness and humility. That's baseline. It's not-

Kerri: Assumed.

Katie: Yeah. From there, we're doing things every day to try to maintain the harmony and wellness of our community. Whereas a lot of Western medicine, I don't want to completely disparage Western medicine, but it feels like it's very interventionist. It's like, once there's a problem, then we're going to find the solution for the problem and apply it.

Kerri: Or the solution to the symptom.

Katie: Yes. How deep does this really go? How deep does restorative justice go? How does it ask us to live and show up every single day? It's like one of those cool tunnels where the block of a blocking prison-industrial complex, actually, it's like this huge tunnel to being. Like, how are we practicing?

Kerri: That they intersect and they overlap.

Katie: Yeah. How are we building community protocols like new ways of being together, which is hard. It's so, so hard and are atomized society. In the Bay Area, housing is so expensive and it really atrophies our community connections in a lot of ways. But we're still trying. I think we're finding out that Block is going to be one of the doorways to all these other dimensions of building and being.

Kerri: Well, I would imagine Block, Build and Be are doorways to one another.

Katie: Exactly.

Kerri: Which makes it more complicated and more beautiful. The poem blossoms. I want to ask about Build, and the way that I want to ask about it, as someone who comes from Block, is whether social location has anything to do with what shape we take inside of this framework. Because I think about myself. I'm a white gender straight, able bodied, educated, I mean, you name it. I have great proximity to power and privilege. I'm drawn particularly to Block, because I'm proximal to it.

Kerri: I also think about while I have energy around Build in specific ways, I actually don't think I should lead Build, or imagine Build even. Because I think I'm limited based on my location, my social location and how I've been conditioned and indoctrinated and so on and so forth. I'm just curious. How does social location intersect? I look to people of color, indigenous folks. The most marginalized people who have been left out and

excluded systemically to actually be imagining the more beautiful inclusive future, that we all get to be a part of. That to me feels more hopeful and more bountiful. I'm just curious. Does this not have a place in this work? Is that a part of discernment and wisdom?

Katie: A few things come up for me. One is Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, who's the Monday incredible directors of the Highlander Institute in Tennessee and leads black feminist liberation work. She has talked about how, in certain circumstances, if white folks don't recruit other white folks into where we all want head, they're going to get recruited by the white supremacist fundamentalist part.

Kerri: And they are already. That's right.

Katie: Yeah. I think we have been building institution structures, education for white anti-racism in the US to try to reckon with some of the harm of the history of this place. That's what's allowed us to have this conversation using these terms. I wonder whether there's some amount of fear of overstepping that is preventing more white folks from leading other white folks into a more beautiful, interconnected world. Again, that's understandable, it's not like really a judgment or criticism. I'm just, Ash-Lee's voice is in my mind a little bit.

Kerri: Well, and that's good contemplation. Because I believe that shame too, is a construct of white supremacy. It keeps us quiet. It keeps us inactive. It keeps us feeling separate. It keeps us fearing the risk of connection, and the stake-making and saying the wrong thing. Which I think plays into that Christian indoctrination of what is good, and what is bad and what is binary. I think there is something to that. The way I hear you also framing it is that white folks have a responsibility, too. To like, "Go get your people." So that we can be ready to follow the vision of what's next.

Katie: I love how you're putting it, too. Because I think we need to understand that building doesn't always have to look one way. Building doesn't have to look like corporate like, this is the one big thing. I'm going to coach everyone and annex everything. That there can be incredible, as it's happening in a lot of different places. Or even like Asian allies to black lives matter, this wings of movement work that are producing really, really beautiful stuff. Like you said, the leadership and the restoring of balance of being led by people who are directly impacted by things, it definitely needs to happen. I think that our entire idea of building maybe has been really warped by industrialism and colonizer mentality. What does it mean to think of ourselves as building in a much more organic ecological way like building these, like the bees are pollinating the thing and the thing is doing the thing. All these incredible-

Kerri: It got to the ecosystem.

Katie: Yeah. Like I heard, Charles Eisenstein was describing a story of, bears will scratch bark on trees. And then a certain fungus will grow in that bark. And then bees will come and visit the fungus. Then the fungus provides them with immunity against certain diseases that are killing the bees right now. Yeah. It's just like-

Kerri: Thank God for the bears.

Katie: Yeah. Exactly. And the trees and the bark. All these different pieces and parts.

Kerri: Everyone is a part of it.

Katie: Yeah.

Kerri: That's intervening, again.

Katie: Right. We don't have to elevate the bee or the bark or the bear. That's not the point, at all. But because we're trying to heal from false hierarchies, like illusions of hierarchy and worth. That's a lot of what many of us are grappling with. It's understandable.

Kerri: It feels corrective, but for me, it feels more possible. Like there actually is more creativity and resilience and spaciousness and expansion. When ideas and innovations and solutions are coming from people who have been navigating that line for so long, I'm actually like, "Thank God." To me, it's like, "Well, who's been building all along?" Who built this mess, who fucking built the mess that we're in? Don't let them build. There's so much more that we don't know because we've been stuck inside this house for so long. Who can build be the thing that's beyond our wildest imagination?

Katie: Yeah. It is happening. It is happening.

Kerri: It's totally happening. I'm thinking about Adrian again and define great institutions and just counterculture.

Katie: Yes.

Kerri: We are seeing that emerge everywhere.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. Here in the Bay Area, the Sogorea Te Land Trust was also really this building structure that was born out of these block fights to defend sacred land, sacred places to Ohlone people. When the blocking was being overwhelmed by developers, this new form emerged of the land trust. And now that they have the form of the land trust, it's like, "All of us get to get information." Those of us working on housing and inter-identification, literally this recent building developer, we pressure them into meeting with the Sogorea Te Land Trust leaders and paying a tax to the land trust. They've developed what they call the Shuumi Land Tax.

Katie: Now that there is a clear process in the language of, "We still are operating with this myth that land can be owned or whatever." Using the tools available to us, it's a real game-changer. The land that they are holding and stewarding is partly used to revive ceremony and ritual and protocol of how to greet among tribes in this part of colonized California. It's like, gives me chills if you think about it. It's like this really incredible

indigenous women-led. It's the first Indigenous women-led Land Trust in the US. They're just making really incredible amazing things happen with this building.

Kerri: Well, The other thing I just heard you say that makes this model, I think, so resilient is that, when Block isn't working. Because I do think also we have a tendency to do that. To block, block more, block harder, keep blocking, don't stop. It's not working. When something's not working, whether it's be, block or build. I'm sure this goes for all of them. There's an opportunity to shape shift, or to call someone else in or to do something different and that just unlocks all these other beautiful shapes and opportunities and pathways and tunnels to other things. I want to ask about Be, "I'm not saving it for last." It's not be is last. This is not sequential, you've already told us this. This does feel like a big one in this particular moment, especially since as you named, it's been often left out of activism.

Kerri: The thing I think I want to ask around Be is having to do with despair and how my tendency is to be ferocious when I feel fear and when I feel despair. That's the default. That's my stance. Which is great and also unhealthy at times when it's not, when I'm not in being. When I'm not conscious of what's happening. I think people are really afraid. I think when you really look, when you have real clear seeing it. The degradation of our planet, how entrenched systems of oppression are. How indoctrinated we are in the ideologies of supremacy and domination and profit over people. I think it's hard to exist inside of that and find hope and keep going. What is the being practice around despair? How do we feel into that? Because it does feel necessary to touch down into it. Sometimes I get nervous and I'm going to get lost in it.

Katie: These twin streams of our political and spiritual lineage is, for me, like the political lineage that says, "Never give up. Keep fighting." The spiritual lineage really says, "Release what you think you need."

Kerri: Wow.

Katie: Be with the grieving and the suffering that comes up. Don't try to push it away. Don't try to numb it. Don't try to create a workaround. Because it also exists. It's also part of the larger belonging. This is the richness of the paradox, for me. Thich Nhat Hanh has survived war, have seen so many friends die. Now in his old age, he says, "I have never been born, and I will never die." That level of understanding of the larger self beyond the small self.

Katie: Again, you know how stuff hits you just differently at different times of life? And there would've been a part of my life when I would've really hated that kind of statement and just found it irrelevant at best to what's going on politically. When so much is at stake, there's so much suffering. But I think teachers like him are really masterful at helping us not be overwhelmed by the grief. Like, "Try to fix it." Which is like you're saying, a form of fear reactivity.

Kerri: Like avoidant? Attack. Manage.

Katie: Yeah. But what if I really, in Joanna Macy's work also really incorporates, it starts with grieving. We have to move. Acknowledge grief and loss. And from there we can move towards hopefulness and change.

Kerri: It's funny when I think about Sacred Rage, when I'm really looking at it, I think it's grief.

Katie: Yeah. James Baldwin said, "I think a reason people cling so stubbornly to their hates is because they sense that once hate is gone, they'll have to deal with pain." I think he was talking about white hatred, like white supremacist hatred. The vociferous permanent warrior, like stance of someone like me in movement that wants to defeat people who are threatening the Earth and species. I have to look at my own sacred rage. One of our Buddhist Peace Fellowship, our most famous online or, sorry, most popular online course.

Kerri: It can be famous, too.

Katie: Sure. Yeah. Thanks to Kate Johnson and Don Haney. Once you put it together, it's called, U Mad? Wisdom for Rageful Times. It's like, interviews with seven different Dharma teachers about how to work with our anger. There is a tension between glossing over anger or vilifying anger from a spiritual perspective, and then glorifying anger from a political perspective and seeing that. I think of anger as a Monsanto, like, "Grow the crop really big, really fast." Our outrage and our anger can really mobilize people, big and fast because of the fear. But is that what we really want long-term? Like, what does it do to the soil?

Kerri: Yes. You had to roll. Yeah, what is it doing to the soil?

Katie: Being, I think also another good example of a mashup to me are a couple that we have talked about in other conversations. One is like, "I grew up, I was taught to chant no justice, no peace." Dharma like really Buddhist practice and training really turned that on its head, and it's just like, "No. What is the piece that can never be taken away no matter what the awful circumstances externally?"

Katie: It's scary. I don't claim to have any mastery over this. What I have experienced or witnessed is that the openness to listening and stillness that comes with peace and again, listening to the quieter instruments can make us more creative in our ability to respond to harm and structural harm, structural violence. Peace, we want to be careful not to have that mean the negative piece of conformity and going to the status quo.

Kerri: Complacency. Totally.

Katie: Exactly. Also, it's like on a really petty level. Again, does peace mean boring. Am I going to become boring by becoming a peaceful person? These are the real questions that-

Kerri: Well, and I feel like a lot of what you're naming is just how words have been also co-opted by culture. They're political, words are political. I love the inquiry around, what

do we mean by peace? What do we mean by anger? What do we mean by justice? That feels like a worthy inquiry, so that we can say what we mean and embody the nuance of it. Because I do think you're right. It's easy to default to these mantras, these binary mantras, these fixed absolute mantras and not allow for the expansion, the complexity, the possibility that's in between.

Katie: Yeah. I think it's happening. We're so grateful to all the movement groups that are insisting on the indispensability of cultural work and how singing, singing can be such a more sustaining way to take up space than chanting over and over, "No justice, no peace." We did a blockade, a meditation blockade in front of a hotel that was hosting a weapons expo for police training. We were trying to get the hotel to kick out the weapons training. We were planning the action and we were wondering whether to allow the folks in the crowd to chant while people were blockading the entrance. We said, "No. It feels like, that's always demoralizing at some point. Your energy lags and you can't keep shouting at the nonresponsive building."

Katie: But the very last minute, some monastics showed up with drums and they're like, "Can we chant?" We were like, "Oh, that type of chanting. Yes." They sustained hours of this incredibly beautiful drumming and chanting. Again, that has never left many communities. Particularly in the South, African-American communities, indigenous communities. People are doing, even Jewish communities, I think. I've seen Jewish community do cop watch, while singing during Shabbat. It's amazing.

Kerri: It's incredible.

Katie: Yeah. I think we're finding our way back to some of that.

Kerri: Reclaiming of art and justice.

Katie: Yeah, and ceremony, and-

Kerri: Ritual, yeah.

Katie: ... ritual and again, the politics of irrepressibility rather than politics of pressure. Like, I have to force you through my for, for chanting.

Kerri: Well, I want to so appreciate you and Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the permission you've given us to be many things at once. Also the skills that you help us cultivate around discernment and nuance and holding the spiritual complexity of who we are in this moment and the push. I feel like there's a push in your work. I don't want this to come up the wrong way, but to be better. We can do better. We can get information and we can play our roles. We can understand our role in the revolution in a much more nuanced and inter-being way. And just also the way in which you allow us to touch into our grief, but also let it coexist with hope. I just love your work so much, and I get life from it, so thank you.

Katie: Thank you. Thank you.

Kerri: I'm excited that other people are going to get to experience you, and experience this work, and learn more, and be curious, and dig in. Because we've got a long road ahead. Let it be joyful.

Katie: Kerri, thank you so much. What a blessing and a gift in this lifetime to have a conversation with someone. Like, you get it. You absolutely get all of the tensions and contradictions and beauty and possibility. Because you also have been pushing and opening yourself to transformation and change. I really appreciate and admire it.

Kerri: Thank you.

Katie: And admire the way that you conduct these conversations in the podcast. I hope people might find something useful from this. We'll keep changing.

Kerri: I'm sure they will.

Katie: We'll keep changing.

Kerri: Yeah, because I don't know that I get it, but I'm getting it and it's ongoing. And one of the things I love about this podcast is that we try to have conversations that push us. I don't mean push in a block way. I mean, just push in a build way and then a be way to do things differently. Thank you for being a part of it.

Katie: No, thank you. Yeah. And listeners, genuine invitation to, if I've said something that has caused harm, I ask for your forgiveness. If I've said something that you'd to push back on, I really welcome that. So feel free to reach out to me. I'm honored to be in conversation with this network, with this community. So, thank you.

Kerri: Thank you for modeling that and it's making me think that we should do that in every podcast. Because we just don't know what we don't know. And there's humanness in that, so thank you.

Katie: It's been a joy. Thank you, Kerri.