

## The Garrison Institute Presents: The Common Good Podcast Transcript

Peter Senge (Episode 29)

[Please note: Although the transcript is largely accurate, in some cases it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription software errors.]

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[00:00:57] **Jonathan Rose:** Welcome to the Garrison Institute presents the Common Good. I'm Jonathan FP Rose. In this series, we explore how contemplation, moral imagination, and systems change help us build a more compassionate and resilient world. Today I'm joined by Peter Senge, one of the world's most influential thinkers on systems change and organizational learning.

[00:01:19] Peter is a senior lecturer at MIT Sloan, the founding chair of the Society for Organizational Learning, and the author of the Landmark Book, the Fifth Discipline For Decades, his work has asked a profound question. How can we learn to see the larger systems that we are part of and learn to change them together?

[00:01:37] In this conversation, we'll explore what it means to move beyond fragmentation, to build institutions that can learn and to cultivate the shared wisdom needed and serve the common good.

[00:02:08] Welcome, Peter.

[00:02:09] **Peter Senge:** Thank you very much, Jonathan.

[00:02:12] **Jonathan Rose:** So I'd love to begin with how did you become Peter Senge? Where were you born? How'd you grow up? And kind of what led you to the work that we know you so well for?

[00:02:23] **Peter Senge:** Well, these questions are always, uh, simple, but not so right. Uh. It is funny, but from my perspective, I've basically been doing the same thing pretty much my whole life.

[00:02:36] I grew up in la I was four and a half years old when my parents were part of the Great Midwestern migration, which occurred in huge numbers after World War II at various, I was a four and a half, as I said, when I, when I got to la. So that's where I grew up. It was a great place to grow up. I was like never inside a house.

[00:02:57] I mean, I, I spent my entire life playing baseball, I think. So I had a, you know, just a regular old normal upbringing. My folks, we lived in Pacoima, which is in the San Fernando Valley, near San Fernando. And when I was a kid, I can vividly remember riding around the backseat of my folks' car and you'd see nothing but orange groves and lemon groves that were, by the time I was ready to go to college, there were a few tucked away in little corners, but he had to drive a long way to find him.

[00:03:27] So it was a very, um, profound experience actually, in a way, because I saw how fast things can change for the worse. I mean, I've always thought if you could take any human being and punk 'em down in Southern California in 1948 or 1951, and then again in 1965 or 1975, which would you prefer? I don't think it would be much of a choice.

[00:03:52] You know, by the time I went away to college, the smog was so bad that they'd literally have days when all the kids had to come off the playgrounds. Now, that got cleaned up a little bit because people figured out the technical causes and you had all kinds of car regulations on, uh, emissions. But the very fact that it happened was a stunning example of what a lot of people in the world have lived through.

[00:04:13] I mean, paradise disappears very quickly, and once it's disappeared, it like really doesn't come back. So before I ever thought about it, that experience I think, was quite formative because. But the time, I remember having a conversation with my mom. I think it was before I went to college. I was probably 17, and I just had this very clear idea.

[00:04:38] It was clear to me that there was one problem in the world and there were a lot of manifestations, but really there was one basic problem in the world. The level of interconnectedness in our world has grown profoundly. We don't understand it. We're completely victimized by it. We created it. So that gap between the level of interconnectedness that we live and the level of interconnectedness that we see and understand and, and can some sense guide or lead ourselves around is profound.

[00:05:07] And it's grown steadily throughout the last, at least 75 to a hundred years. And what, what are the consequences that, well, the consequences of everything we see, you know, from climate change and all the ecological imbalances to massive migrations and the people around the world who are, you know, forced to leave their home.

[00:05:26] We always think, oh, we have all these migrants. But if you put yourself in the shoes, those migrant. If someone told you, oh, by the way, your house is burning down, your land is

gone, you're gonna have to move. This would not be a very settling thing for any of us. So these are huge, massive decisions to leave your home, maybe a place we've had generations and suddenly pack up your kids and, and for no certainty whatsoever of improvement.

[00:05:51] So whether you talk about the, the ecological or the human side of these profound imbalances, I think the underlying source is pretty clear. You know, there's many, many ways to say it, But the modern era has profound illogic built into it, and we've all so accustomed to it that we don't see it from the simplest.

[00:06:13] At what point in your life, you know, maybe two, maybe three, did you know, you couldn't keep putting more stuff in the same box,

[00:06:20] **Jonathan Rose:** right? So

[00:06:22] **Peter Senge:** the logic that we can grow materially in a finite space is profound, and yet we somehow accept it.

[00:06:29] **Jonathan Rose:** So what's really interesting is I've been looking at, you know this, we live in this amazing gift, which is called the cosine.

[00:06:37] This time that emerged, uh, about 10,000 years ago, in which all of a sudden the climate stabilized. We stopped having ice ages and overheating, and all of a sudden all the ecological niches, the world opened up to us humans spread throughout the world. And we created many, many different cultures, of which this is just one.

[00:06:58] So we have many other possibility. We created indigenous cultures, we created pastoral cultures, and many, many people figured out how to fit sufficiently into their ecological niche. But this one branch of our species somehow became dominant with this a, a crown, incredibly consumptive, aggressive, needy, inability to see the whole.

[00:07:25] So I wanna go back to your work then. Off in college year. So what were the threads that led to the development of the idea? The fifth discipline.

[00:07:36] **Peter Senge:** Well, I always was interested in systems. Yeah, I mean that's kind of a western way, something obviously, but you know, this kind of profound connectedness that we don't see.

[00:07:46] Um, so I studied engineering. It was a very logical place to learn about systems because it, it's a branch of understanding systems that have been developing for 250 years. The flyball governor, the iconic engineering device, so that if the engine starts spinning too fast, the governor expands from to trivial force and shuts the engine down.

[00:08:08] This idea of feedback systems was something engineers had worked with for a long time, and I was at Stanford as an undergraduate, which was a really good place for me. Because, uh, again, I was outdoors most of the time. I actually went there to play like baseball

and I'll study engineering too. So I did a really great engineering faculty and was a liberal arts college.

[00:08:28] So I, my second year in college, I spent six months living in Austria studying music and art and, you know, it was a perfect place for me. So, while I was kind of majoring in systems engineering, I, I took a whole series of courses on, on philosophy of knowledge. It was just a wonderful place for someone like me to get a very broad and deep education in the liberal arts with a technical focus.

[00:08:52] So that just deepened and, you know, gave me a chance to refine it. And by the time I, um, was ready to kind of move on from undergraduate. I had no plans whatsoever. I had a good friend. It turned out though we had studied together in Austria. She was getting married to a, a guy back in Cambridge. This may sound strange, but it gives you a little insight.

[00:09:13] The, the quirkiness of my persona back then, maybe it hasn't changed much. We were chatting one evening at Alice's parents' home and I said, Alice, so so are you gonna get married? Cool. And then Cambridge. Wow, that's really wild. You lived in California your whole life. Just like me. You gonna go to Cambridge?

[00:09:29] He, and he said, yeah, you ought to come. You'd really like it. And I said, oh, well maybe for a couple years I'll go. Then I said, literally what schools are there in Cambridge? And she said, well, there's Harvard and MIT. And I said, well, I'll apply to MIT 'cause I'm in engineering and it'll be easier for me to get in.

[00:09:44] And that, that's literally how I end up at MIT. So then again, as luck would have it, and I don't see this luck as a random phenomenon anymore. First two weeks I was there, I met the woman who I was still married to and I met my teacher. It didn't take long, just boom.

[00:09:59] **Jonathan Rose:** Hmm.

[00:10:00] **Peter Senge:** I had a, basically an apprenticeship for 10 years with a man named Jay Forrester, who very famous and, I mean, he's an engineer's engineer.

[00:10:07] He's in the inventors Hall of Fame with the right brothers and Marconi and Edison. He invented radar and then later on he invented Core Memory, which was the key breakthrough to digital computation. So he was a very MIT guy, you know, and, and I mean that in a very positive sense in that there's kind of an image of, obviously MIT is this kind of technology innovation hub, which is, But the real key to understanding the kinda MIT ethos was something that I eventually failed very comfortable with, which is that it's basically people working together on real issues.

[00:10:40] The, all that work on radar was because the Japanese were, were basically winning the Pacific Theater. Radar changed that all of a sudden the American ships could see the Japanese, uh, airplanes. The work on digital computation was because Jay sold the idea in 1946, just after, you know, world War II has ended, and there's this euphoria that lasts for a

couple years until all of a sudden the Cold War comes and the, in that moment of switch, when all of a sudden the euphoria was coming.

[00:11:09] Paranoia Jay convinced the Navy, who we knew well because of his work on radar that, you know, we had a big problem coming up. The amount of data you're gonna need to process to secure North America from attacks, from missiles, particularly. Is much greater than human operators can gather and organize. It all sounds very medical today, but imagine there is no idea, there's no concept of a computer.

[00:11:34] So he sold them. They needed a machine environment to gather and process all this information. The net of all that was eight years to develop the first general purpose digital computer. There's a whole floor. The Smithsonian History of Science and Technology Museum developed this project. They developed, designed, prototyped and supervised the physical production of the first 27 general purpose digital computers ever made by a little company, which got into the computer business, they call it I-B-M-I-B-M was to keep my international business machines made adding machines.

[00:12:08] So anyhow, that's a, it's just an iconic MIT story and I love those kind of stories because you know, Jay used to say, you know, everybody's got about the same amount of time. The question is how do you use it? Do you use your time working on any problem less than the most important problem you could work on?

[00:12:24] So before I knew what vision was, or I had really kind of got thinking about that, I was being kind of dipped into these realities of people doing amazing things because they had a dream and they saw a real possibility and they had no problem. Jay just had zero problem venturing into the unknown with everybody saying, it's literally, people used to say it had been mathematically proven that general purpose, digital computation was impossible.

[00:12:50] A lot of those people changed their tunes pretty quickly once they did it. And so that was the attitude Jay had. Well, okay, fine, that's your point of view, but once we do it, you may have a different point of view. So that's spirit of invention, which I, I think is really a channeling of this deep creativeness in us, you know, imagination.

[00:13:10] What did Einstein say? Imagination always Trumps reason, you know, and, and that ability to really get passionate about something and just pursue it because, oh, this is all I really wanna do. But not just for your own benefit, but for a real problem that can affect a lot of people. That was kind of what I was steeped in.

[00:13:31] And so all these ideas about independence and connectedness kind of landed in, in a funny place where then I found out gradually Jay was developing whole general purpose approach to understanding complexity. He was 37 years old after the whole computer project was finished. So imagine you're 37 years old, you've invented radar, you've led the team to build for his digital computer.

[00:13:51] Now you say, well, what's next? And Jay said, well, I've got to do now what I've always wanted to do, which is help human beings understand complexity. So I found a mentor.

[00:14:04] **Gretchen:** We'll be right back after a few announcements.

[00:14:17] **Jonathan Rose:** Amazing. You also. In your schema. So you, somewhere along the way, then you write the Fifth Discipline, which is a big breakout book and lays out a whole plan for really a process, uh, more than a plan for how to, how to become a learning person within a learning organization. And one of your, one of the things you call for is personal mastery.

[00:14:42] And so what you are saying is that not only do you need to become systems thinkers and apply that and think about how organizations learn, et cetera, but you yourself have to evolve to be able to develop these capacities. So where did that thinking come from?

[00:14:57] **Peter Senge:** Jay always had an ex. You might imagine a character like Jay would attract some very interesting supporters.

[00:15:03] It attracts all kinds of crazy people. But you know, I gradually got to meet through Jay, some amazing people. In the business world. This often surprises people, and today for all kinds of good reasons, there's so much cynicism, But the business world. But it would meet these people who had the same kind of intellectual integrity, deep commitment to real issues.

[00:15:24] But this is something that Jay didn't have. We're masterful at getting people working together effectively. And so these were the kind of business people who would be attracted to Jay. And so through that I got really interested and had the chance to see firsthand, you know, what does it mean to build a team that can really work together, can really create together.

[00:15:44] I think that was more in the MIT model, that's kind of implicit because the lab model is people working together. But you might say the tools and methods and theory of how that all happens is usually a little more in the background, but not coincidentally. If you look at the Sloan School of Management at MIT, who do you find in 1950s, almost the same time that CHA came into the Sloan School, theory x Theory Y Douglas McGregor, the human side of enterprise.

[00:16:11] So MIT always had this kind of subtler part. And I really do think they tie together. When you think about what does it take for people to work together to make real breakthroughs, to solve really truly complex problems or make real headway against those problems, there is this human side. So I don't think Jay and McGregor may have even known each other well, but they came to the Sloan School about the same time.

[00:16:34] And so this human dimension went from being implicit to explicit and then particularly by virtue of getting to be around people who were masterful at doing it. And over really the next 20, 25 years, I had so many mentors. I mean people who I would consider true masters. It. What does it mean to build a team, build an organization, work together to accomplish something really meaningful?

[00:16:58] Can

[00:16:59] **Jonathan Rose:** you, uh, do you remember, did you give a story about one of them?

[00:17:03] **Peter Senge:** His name was, uh, Roger Salon. Roger's been retired for a long time. I don't think he'd mind me using his name. He was, in my opinion, Ford's best manager for a long time, and my evidence for that is pretty simple. He came up in manufacturing.

[00:17:15] They would literally send him around the world to manufacturing facilities that were a basket case. I mean, imagine he was sent to Northern Ireland to be the, the plant manager for a plant where all the managers were Protestants and all the workers were Catholic. I mean, those are the kind of places they sent Roger to and consistently within three or four years.

[00:17:32] These places would get turned around and they would stay turned around. It wasn't just Roger's magic and he left, it all fell apart because he had an extraordinary knack for kind of developing human beings. He had a plant in Mexico, but this is the kind of idiocy American corpore, multinational corporations do.

[00:17:51] So they're gonna build this very high tech plant in Mexico, you know, state-of-the-art beyond anything they'd build anywhere, manufacturing process, et cetera. And by the way, it's gonna be all staffed by about 6,000 Mexicans. Few of any of whom had a secondary education, right? That's, these are cheap, right?

[00:18:10] And Roger was the plant manager and he had, you know, 20 Americans on his side, or people from around the world with engineering degrees. So a few of the things Roger did, he made it possible for the workers to get equivalency degrees. For secondary education, and they created their own engineering degree program.

[00:18:29] I would meet some of these people like 15 years later and they'd say, Roger changed my life. You know, I came in, you know, from a very poor family. I spoke almost no English whatsoever. I am now an engineer. I have an engineer's degree. And there were many stories like this, and you realize that's the way Roger worked.

[00:18:47] He couldn't imagine doing it any other way. You know, his vision of being a manager was about growing human beings so that you could do things extraordinary at a larger scale. This is not a team of, you know, five, six inventors. This is a team of 6,000, mostly Mexicans. Oh, by the way, typical thing Roger did.

[00:19:08] Because they, they were in, it's all temporary facilities. When they're there, they have no plant. And of course, Ford has a grand design for a plant they're gonna build. So Roger said, well, look, why don't we get a bunch of Mexican architecture students to come in here and help us design this plant? Which he did, didn't ask his bosses at all.

[00:19:22] And they came up with this extraordinary design, which looks very Mexican. Guess what? It's painted pink and purple on the outside and they just bill it. Roger didn't ask for any approval. They bill it. And he had his boss, who was the vice president of manufacturing, come to visit a year later, and he looked around and said, uh, Roger, this is our plant.

[00:19:42] And Roger said, yeah, this is our plant. People are very proud of it. It's designed by these kids from, I think TE to Monterey. And he said, doesn't look like Aerok in Roger said

Anyhow. So his willingness to kind of defy the hierarchy and the tradition in service of what would be meaningful for people was kind of boundless, but he produced remarkable results.

[00:20:07] So the company tolerated him. So I learned a lot about corporate politics and I learned a lot about what it means to innovate in the midst of very, you might say, non conducive conditions.

[00:20:17] **Jonathan Rose:** Hmm. And out of this, I think must have become very clear your idea about collective learning, not just individual, how that organizations learn and that organizations can be dumb or be intelligent.

[00:20:31] **Peter Senge:** Yeah. You know, those ideas were crystallizing gradually and as you can tell from the stories, you know, what really gave them kind of coherence and what really made them very live for me was lived experience.

[00:20:44] **Jonathan Rose:** Mm-hmm.

[00:20:45] **Peter Senge:** You know, the fifth one was written after about 10 years of these kinds of experiences.

[00:20:50] So I just had zero doubt that the ideas worked because I had seen them work.

[00:20:56] **Jonathan Rose:** Right. That's amazing. And. Your work as it's evolved is now focused on something that you call generative social field. So what you're saying is that it's actually, it's not just about the leader you're describing, it's about the social field, the relationship between all the people, participants in it that create a context.

[00:21:17] So maybe break down, let's, you can talk about it as what's the generative social field, but maybe also talk about what, what is generative, what is social and what's the field?

[00:21:27] **Peter Senge:** Well, first off, it's a phrase that's been used by a lot of folks. Otto Sharmer has used the phrase, for a long time, metabol came in as a collaborator after studying what she called generative fields amongst dog packs.

[00:21:41] I mean, she was using animal, uh, bios. Semiotics is the phrase, the meaning making amongst living systems. It's a very kind of curious, little niche, but very relevant to all the work we do. But anyhow, so people coming from many, many different directions, but have found this kind of idea, something that they can flesh out and relate to their own backgrounds and traditions.

[00:22:04] Generative would be, in some ways a synonym for creative. You know, generative can bring something new into reality. Obviously, it's not just anything new. We bring a lot of stupid things into reality, but it's, there's a depth of meaning. To what we're generating because you could say, you know, uh, people panicking in a theater, in a fire, you know, are a generous social field.

[00:22:28] A lot gets created in uri, but it's pretty chaotic and it's pretty destructive. So social, and that's why I gave the example of Metta. We are a social species. I don't think generative social fields are unique to humans at all. I think there are a phenomenon that social species can enter into, because, you know, what makes a social species viable at some level is a level of, you might say, collective sense, making collective intelligence, you know, uh, all the ways different social species will organize themselves to accomplish things, sometimes even with some apparent level of awareness, but sometimes quite spontaneously.

[00:23:10] Um, and field is a word that, um, I, I, I like because we, there's two or three different ways to talk about this. I've come really fond in the last couple years of a indigenous. Way of talking about all this, But the term field, like the word system, has a very rich tradition in western science. You know, the evolution of field theories was really what was the, the predecessor to quantum mechanics and all the revolutions of science in the 20th century, where we started to realize there was a whole different way of understanding reality that was not about things and not about fragmentation and different things affecting different things.

[00:23:52] But was really a more, the deeper level you might see of reality, the field that holds the things of which is still very mysterious in science. You know, you ask physicists, what the hell is gravitational? They'll go, we don't know. There's this view. There's this view. No one quite understands gravitational fields, but we know it's a real phenomenon.

[00:24:11] You know, this is in a gravitational field. I won't run the experiment right now, but it's relatively heavy. We all know that, and it affects all the things in it, right? This gravitational field that you and I are living in is not partial. It doesn't affect some things and not other things. It affects everything and it's a different kind of causality.

[00:24:34] That would be a one way, I think the way the fetal has been very powerful. It kind of legitimated. A much older idea that there is a different level of causality beyond the effect of things on things. You know, if I throw something and it hits something, it knocks it over, right? That's the type of causality.

[00:24:57] But there's a different causality in the field, and I think it was the beginning of what kind of broke the hegemony of fragmentation and materialization in Western science. And that's not a small thing. Since obviously Western science has played such a big influence in shaping Western culture. Now this, the sad part of the story, of course, is that the migration of ideas from science to mainstream culture is over centuries, not decades.

[00:25:26] So we still operate like, you know, materialists, right? What's most real? What's what You can touch, what you can feel, what you can see, not. What sits behind your feeling, not this sense of calmness or this sense of anxiety that all of a sudden you can see affects everybody. See, we have this lived experience of fields because that's social reality is fields and there's stuff that happens in those fields.

[00:25:54] So we live in gravitational fields all the time, created by human beings or created by the complex dynamics of our energy systems interacting, or whatever way you wanna think

about the indigenous way of understanding this, that I've come quite fond of ads and element that I think we've kind of struggled to integrate in the idea of generative fields.

[00:26:16] So the way I've learned this one is from a Blackfoot teacher, a man named Leroy Little Bear, who I've known for many, many years. He's written a lot about native science, very influential. He once was the head of the Harvard Native Studies program. He didn't stay long. He said a lot of political, I'm not getting much done here.

[00:26:34] He, he lives in his home territory in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada, just over the US border. Anyhow, they call it ethical space, which is a very, it's the space and field obviously are very similar metaphors. They're pointing to what's holding things, not the things themselves. But Leroy says that when two humans really are with each other, there is an ethical space that develops that space, has agency, and that's always been the key idea about fields.

[00:27:11] These are not just, you know, we have a nice relationship here. What might we do with it? Or how might it affect us? No, the space, the field has agency, that's why I said the critical breakthrough in modern in, in Western science was fields are causal. So in human terms, we'd say agency, But the whole idea of an ethical space is that, is the space itself has agency.

[00:27:38] So you might say, and this of course, you'll recognize Jonathan from all your training on many different levels. Where there are two, there are always three. There is you and me and there is the field that holds you and me. It's a being as much as you are being, and I'm a being. It's a living phenomenon. As much as you're a living phenomenon, and I'm a living phenomenon, it has agency just as you have agency and I have agency that ethical space has agency, and of course the key adjective there, ethical.

[00:28:14] When that ethical space comes into existence, its agency is in service of life. So that's the indigenous way of talking about generative fields. And not surprisingly humans have been at work trying to understand this for many thousands of years. You think of the role of ceremony just to, you know, give ground what indigenous society doesn't have ceremony.

[00:28:38] What's ceremony? Well, it's, it's creating a, it's honoring a space and the qualities of the space itself, not just you and I as individuals.

[00:28:48] **Jonathan Rose:** So actually what's interesting, I've been doing a lot of thinking about how do we create, uh, resilience and regeneration in the mid Hudson Valley. The area around the Garrison Institute is based, and this is where the original alliance of the five and then seven tribes that created the Confederacy, who would then see Confederacy came from, they had a ceremony, which they, which was translated as a ceremony of condolence.

[00:29:16] It's a funny word, condolence. But before any meeting, you had to go through a ceremony in which, in essence, you sublimated your individual ego. You aligned yourself with the greater good. You, you aligned yourself with the seven generations. You aligned yourself with nature, you aligned yourself with each other.

[00:29:37] You could not begin any deliberation until you had completed that ceremony. So it was acts. So, you know, one of the things that I also find in, in your work, which actually reflects this, what I'd like you to talk about is, first you develop awareness that, that awareness becomes the basis of transformation, but awareness becomes first.

[00:30:02] So I'd love you to talk about what is awareness of self and systems and, and what you've just said is it's actually awareness of the, this generative ethical whole.

[00:30:14] **Peter Senge:** Well, I think, you know, given the cultural background that we share, it's natural for us to start off with individual and talk about individual awareness.

[00:30:24] And then it becomes kind of a consequence of being a human being embodied, having a brain, having a nervous system. But you know, you can flip that whole thing. I think in many older traditions it's the, you might say the evolutionary phenomenon is the opposite. The awareness starts. The awareness is there first, and out of that awareness, things get produced like bodies and minds or embodied minds.

[00:30:53] Brains or whatever you wanna call it. But there is something that precedes that, which interestingly, you know, and this is an area that I'm just learning very slowly and gradually, but it's, it doesn't, none of it surprises me, but a lot of the, the first big steps of western science, whereas I was talking about field theories, electromagnetism, and then in the 18th, 19th century, which gradually gives rise to quantum mechanics of relatively quantum mechanics and all that stuff.

[00:31:23] But there's a whole nother thread, which is the large, what's called cosmology in physics. You know, the study of the universe. And, and there's a growing opinion amongst a lot of the leading cosmologists that it all starts with awareness and the essence of it is actually awareness. Some people call it information, which I think is a problematic word to use because we've used, we use in such a particular way, but it, it's pointing the same thing.

[00:31:52] There's a phenomenon that's present, which is there that holds it all. Now to, just to illustrate how that's kind of come down in different lineages. Of course, Buddhism has become quite popular in the, uh, in, in the western world, particularly through Tibetan Buddhism, um, in the, in the last 30, 50 years and all that stuff.

[00:32:16] Um, but of course, Buddhism came very late to Tibet. Uh, and, and integrated as Buddhism does with a lot of the, uh, spiritual traditions that preceded it in Tibet. But if you look at the journey from Buddhism, from India, where of course it never grew very much, but of course has its origins as it spread to Southeast Asia, China, and eventually in Tibet.

[00:32:39] There's a thousand years roughly between the historic shaky moonie, the historic Buddha, that particular Buddha. And of course there's Buddhism that there's multiple Buddhas, but that particular embodiment of Buddha nature and when it really starts to take root and very interesting dynamic time, you know, Buddhism, because it was Dalai Lama, is always, is a very phrase, likes to call it the, the science of mind.

[00:33:02] It's the very disciplined study of awareness. But of course it's awareness. So I can't study from the outside, you know, I'm studying it as I'm living it And so to speak. But there is a notion of mind. In Buddhism that not many people really understand, but it's deep in the, in the theory of Buddhism, there's a, a very famous book, which very few Westerners read, but nowadays with the internet, just Google, uh, the Awakening of Faith.

[00:33:29] No one knows who wrote The Awakening of Faith. It's attributed to an Indian, uh, ASFA gha, but no one knows historically what is or different conjectures, but it shows up in Southeast Asia, in China and Northern India around five, 600 ad. It's generally considered to be written probably around three or 400 ad.

[00:33:51] So you're not yet a thousand years into this process, but you're almost a thousand years since the historic Buddha and Buddhism is migrating and evolving as it does in all these different traditions in Southeast Asia. It's very different than it is when it blends with Taoism in China or blends with, with bone and the traditional Tibetan religions eventually in, uh, Tibet.

[00:34:11] So anyhow, there was this problem that was recognized that, well, this is wonderful, all these new forms of Buddhism that blend and integrate and, and connect, but what is the essence behind all the different forms? So that's the, that's the story about this book. So the awakening of faith. What's the faith?

[00:34:30] I always thought that's a weird term. It sounds very western, but it's faith that enlightenment is possible. That's the faith that's being awakened. And if you think about it, of course that sets in heart of all traditions. At some point they'll, people will say in different visions, you have to have an moment of intent.

[00:34:48] You have to intend to become enlightened. You have to kind of choose the path. How far you'll get, obviously depends on who you are in your last couple of hundred embodiments and whatever. But without that moment of intent, it doesn't matter. It's all just curiosity. So that's what the Awakening of Faith is all about.

[00:35:06] Now, if you look at the Awakening of Faith, the original Sanskrit is about 10 pages. Clearly it was someone trying to boil down all these different things. What is the essence? One mind, two aspects of mind, and then it's three greatneses of minds. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 is where it's organized. One mind. Mind here is not our Western concept of mind at all.

[00:35:30] It's the totality of everything. Everything. 'cause the two aspects are the manifest and the infinite. Two aspects of mind fundamentally. Interdependent. That's the fundamental non-dualism, right? Neither exists without the other. The manifest does not exist without the infinite. The infinite does not exist without the manifest.

[00:35:53] But behind them all is this idea of one mind. As cosmology evolves, it's feeling more and more like people are starting to say, well, if we look at it from the universe standpoint, the manifest, gradually we see there's like this one, something that's behind it all. In the translations of the awakening faith, they'll talk about the nuon and the phenomenon.

[00:36:19] The phenomenon is the manifest, the, the consciousness. But they have one source, and that one source is called mind. So, um. This is where I think we're in a moment right now where, because we have the opportunity know, when I was first told about this book, I had a teacher in China when I was first told about this book, it took me a year to fuck copy.

[00:36:43] It's like not in print anywhere. And I had insisted who helped me a lot today. You can go online and you can, you can look up the Awakening of Faith and you'll find the classic Japanese, uh, takeda, uh, translation in English, which is the one I eventually found. And so we have this moment where we have access to these kind of texts, which were never widely available to anybody.

[00:37:09] So in the midst of all this breakdown, we have this remarkable moment when the possibility of connecting deeply to what humans have worked for, you know, many, many, many tens, hundreds of millennia to understand. Obviously it's not an intellectual understanding, you know, it's, it's an intellectual understanding that's underpins or sits in parallel with an experiential lived experience.

[00:37:37] You gotta put the music and the words together, otherwise you don't have much.

[00:37:42] **Jonathan Rose:** And then, so on one, so I'm gonna go back to personal mastery, which sounds like it's about individualism, but it's actually about dissolving your individualism and developing this. You know what's funny is I, I was just about to use the phrase cosmic consciousness, which I actually haven't used in 50 years, but anyway, so then what's interesting in these two aspects then it seems to me that if we fully live in the ethical space.

[00:38:12] Then our purpose, our intention, our commitment then is to manifest this deep relationality. And that if you really get to the root of the social injustice inequities, the environmental inequities, the great unhappiness that seems to be taking place throughout the world, it's because we've imposed these separation models upon the world.

[00:38:33] And then we have imposed upon them greed and grasping to say, I want that separate piece. Uh, which of course you can never get because it's not a separate piece to begin with. So in your work, okay, so now you like working in school systems, you're working with kids, you're working with whole school systems, you're working from the superintendents on down, and you don't wanna freak 'em out and then come in and say, by the way, I gotta teach you about the universe.

[00:39:01] And yet you want to transform the way they're thinking and doing and working. And so what's that? Talk to us about that translation activity.

[00:39:11] **Peter Senge:** Well, like, like so many areas of, let's say subtle work or deep work, it all starts with your premises. You know, how you enter a space, who you are, you know, who you see yourself, who you intend to be.

[00:39:25] For me, there's a couple things that have always helped. The first is I don't think any of this is a big deal. I think this is all common knowledge, but it's lost. So I never think of trying to

teach anybody anything. I think if there's anything I understand, I know you understand it. Also, it's just that maybe I've worked a little more.

[00:39:49] It had the good fortune to be around some teachers who felt kind of awakened, right? The word awaken is so important in so many spiritual traditions, something that was there all along. I always think everything we do is deeply intuitive and people know it already. So I guess for me that a way to say that.

[00:40:08] It, it helps me enter this kind of work in a respectful manner. You are not a student and I'm a teacher. I've never thought that way. I mean, it's like, it's, it was never kind of would occur to me. Um, but, you know, yeah, I've had a chance to do a few things that maybe you haven't had a chance and you've had a chance to do a lot of things.

[00:40:26] I haven't had a chance. So it's that, uh, kind of orientation of mutual respect, which I don't think is a, is is small potatoes. But I also think it's not, you don't start off that way. I mean, if you're trying to be respectful, it's usually because you're not, and you're trying to overcome that habit. But if you start with an orientation that this is all very self-evident and it's self-evident to all of us.

[00:40:52] You know it. I know it. We all know it. So it's more, you might say, an ontological orientation that leads to an epistemological orientation. It's the sense of the underlying accessibility. I've always found that to be true in most all the real key cultivation traditions. You know, in, in Buddhism, for example, original nature.

[00:41:14] Now that's a term that probably develops again, in the same very dynamic time period around a couple thousand years ago. Buddhism is migrating and you know, there's a lot of teachings develop and kind of what are some of the loving, all of our differences? What do we, what's not different? And I think gradually this notion of original nature starts to get articulated.

[00:41:35] So it's not something you're, you're moving to or something you're moving back to. And that's why in, of course, in a lot of Buddhist traditions, and this is not unique to Buddhism at all, striving, trying to acquire are considered really deep problems. You know, they're problems we all encounter because we're conditioned to seek something we're conditioned to wanna have to.

[00:41:56] Accomplish something in order to be worthy in our own mind. Often in the mind of somebody else very, very often. But you know, in, in all these teachings, you don't have to try to become worthy. You start off worthy. And, you know, over the, over a lot of years and maybe over a few embodiments, you've acquired a lot of habits and interpretations of unworthiness, but I, I don't see a lot of infants striving to be worth, or one year olds or two year olds, they're just doing their thing.

[00:42:31] Worthiness is given. I'm just using this to illustrate, but these kind of core ideas to me are really important because, again, I don't think there's something that people need to learn, but I think there's a lot we all need to learn.

[00:42:50] **Gretchen:** We'll be right back after a few announcements.

[00:43:11] **Jonathan Rose:** So let's go back. In the very beginning of this, you described, you talked about the climate change issues, the social fragmentation, the, the, uh, anyway, all the metta crisis that we're going through. I wanna ask a question to dissolve the question at the same time, because the question I was about to ask is, so where do you see is the leverage points?

[00:43:33] But actually from the one mind point of view, there are no leverage points because it's just the one mind. So maybe, maybe the leverage points are those war poles where we get into the one mind and then act from it. But I, I'm going to use the phrase leverage point with, with that disclaimer. And so what do you see as the leverage points?

[00:43:56] What the leverage points are?

[00:43:58] **Peter Senge:** Yeah. Well I think that in a, in a way it's a very personal question because if it's an intellectual, you know, in, you are kind of reifying the idea of leverage points and what are they, like, they, yeah. But if it's more like, what do I spend my time doing? You know, as Jay used to say, we all have the same amount of time.

[00:44:16] The question is how do we use it? You know, what are the, what are the most useful things I can be doing? You know, that old, you know, where my gifts and my calling intersect. What do they look and feel to me like right now? So, in essence, leverage points is very relevant. You know, 'cause we, none of us can do a lot of stuff.

[00:44:33] We do a few things and that evolves over time. And it's a good reflective lens for kind of noticing where I'm at at this point in my life. Obviously many years ago, for me, the whole idea. Understanding systems and interdependence was a natural focus for me at a certain point that very naturally evolved into people understanding how to work together and how to build kinda relational, uh, integrity in fields and all the, all the social dimensions of this work always occurring in an institutional context.

[00:45:05] But most recently for me, going back to what I said a minute ago, if you kind of take the assumption that there's no news here, it may look like news to us. 'cause we're very confused. You know, we actually think we're a body. We think the material is the more fundamental. If it's not measurable, it's not real.

[00:45:26] You know, that's our cultural milo. So we're very confused about a lot of things. But if you take the view that, you know. People have been investigating, learning, exploring, learning how to live based on this sort of knowledge for a very long time. Then we have a particular moment right now where our genocide, genocidal efforts, which have been quite universal for a long time.

[00:45:53] Humans have been at this. Humans have been busy destroying other humans for a long time. You don't like their culture, but it's not my culture and there are they, and on and on goes. And so we've been at this a long time, but we've been at it in an organized way in the last,

you know, 200 years. Because as the modern Western Eurocentric cultures became to dominate and gained all the power they did through their reductionistic science and application in technology, they could do it in a much bigger way.

[00:46:23] But we haven't quite succeeded. Again, another bit of just personal coincidence. 20, 25 years ago, I made my first trip to BC British Columbia, and now we do a lot of work in that part of the world. Canada has a unique situation. One of the reasons the genocide of the Eurocentric cultures has been less successful in Canada is geography.

[00:46:47] You know, the European cultures we're interested in a little swath of 50 to a hundred miles from the US border north. So as their genocidal practices got really geared up about 50 years or so behind ours, in the US very much model after what we did in the us. We had residential schools. They created residential schools.

[00:47:08] People could escape, enough. People could escape. So today, and there's a few places like this, the World Australia's one, parts New Zealand, or sort of like this, there is a vibrant indigenous. Cultures still existent. The truth is they're like all over North America, but they're in such small pockets. But in parts of BC they're, they're not small.

[00:47:32] So for me personally, a lot of it has been going back to, I had the good fortune to get to meet a lot of teachers. That's how I learned about ethical space long ago from Leroy. And in the last, uh, year or so, I've been doing a lot of writing with Vanessa, Andrea oti, who wrote the book ING Modernity. So that's, to me right now, a an important focus area, which is how can we take a lot of what we've come to understand in western science and all this work on little pockets of renovating the human spirit, I should use rehabilitating.

[00:48:05] But somehow renovating is what came up the human spirit and showing that it's really quite viable and quite pragmatically useful in, in strange places like big corporations, but to really work more closely and learn together with, and how to articulate. You know, so, um, today in the world there's a relatively small number of people who've written books like Vanessa, who are coming out of indigenous traditions, but are enough in the western world.

[00:48:33] They're bridge builders because you and I could go to a powwow, go to ceremony, go to the kind of ceremonies you were describing earlier in the Haha confederacy, and they would be potentially a, a profound experience, but it'd be a real stretch for us to try to explain what's profound and are there ways of bridging these wisdom traditions from basically cultures that very rarely had a, a system of writing.

[00:49:02] So their communication was all oral and symbolic, like the wampum belts for the, uh, for the ha nache in the, in the Confederacy. They formed, but not a symbolic system of writing. There were some of that in central part of, of the Americas, but not much in a lot of places. So there's profound gaps. To kind of translate, share, learn with and from, and the world changes, you know?

[00:49:29] So the evidence is pretty compelling that most indigenous tribes do the same. Stupid things were done. Those didn't last very long. They lost in 1, 3, 4, 500 years, and then they went

to war and they decided we're better than you. And we're not part of a larger ecology. Yeah, we might pay some lip service to it, but we don't really honor our interdependence with land in place.

[00:49:52] So I'm just saying that these are human failings. Most native cultures don't last more than a few hundred years. However, there's lots of exceptions,

[00:50:03] **Jonathan Rose:** and Australia is one of them.

[00:50:05] **Peter Senge:** There's plenty of them, but that's what makes them interesting. You start realizing the concentration of power, concentration of wealth, losing your sense of wholeness in a large wholeness, that's human.

[00:50:17] Phs happens again and again, but. Not always. So the ones that have been around for five, 10,000 years or longer, they're the ones that we can all learn from. 'cause obviously they've learned something or they wouldn't be around five or 10,000 years later. So I think we wanna romanticize indigeneity, but we wanna say that, wait a second.

[00:50:40] The Blackfoot have been here for 15,000 years. The Aboriginals 50 sometimes now people say 60,000 years. Obviously they've learned something to adapt, to evolve, to discover their own internal shortcomings, to overcome those in some ways, to institute ways of operating. There is a unique window right now.

[00:51:04] To build bridges. So that's my long-winded answer to your question. For me personally, right now, the opportunity to write with Vanessa, the opportunity to learn from people like Leroy and bring forth some of his teachings. They've got a wonderful project now called the Buffalo Project, which is to bring ethical space to the whole territory of the buffalo, which he said we had for years.

[00:51:26] We had lots of treaties between different tribes because there was a consciousness Leero say the buffalo have been here about, you know, 50 million years we've been here, we haven't been here a million years yet. Maybe they know something and they are an apex species in their niche. So, um, to kind of connect with work like that, that's going on, to learn support and, you know, one simple story, but I've heard it from many native peoples.

[00:51:55] Why are we still around after, you know, having to go through so much. Of your genocidal practices. Not to mention just the fact that our cultures have been pretty disharmonious because we know sooner or later the humans are gonna need what we know.

[00:52:10] **Jonathan Rose:** Right. You know, the, well, I was gonna say two separate things.

[00:52:14] In, uh, many of the indigenous cultures, certainly in the Australian one, their foundation this. So we start with, here's how the earth was formed, here's how life evolved, blah. And then there was this moment in which we screwed up and then we learned the lesson. And the same thing by the way, in the Hopi tradition and in many of the traditions.

[00:52:33] And so that sense of, uh, historical humility is really important. And then the other thing is, um, you know, the seven fire prophecy, which essentially looks at the colonization of the west, the destruction of the, uh, American indigenous, uh, north American indigenous culture. But it says there's a moment in that moment is now.

[00:52:57] Which says, if we have remembered just enough of our wisdom, and if you are just enough open-hearted to receive it and to bring your technology united with our wisdom, then together we can walk down a path of peace and together, if we don't do this, then the world will be a charred, destroyed place.

[00:53:20] **Peter Senge:** Yeah, that's exactly right.

[00:53:22] One of the people whose work we've built on a lot in, uh, in everything I've been doing the last 3, 4, 5 years and is Gregory Kete. Gregory is a, uh, Indian from, uh, New Mexico. Anyhow, Greg, before he became really well known, I got to know him as a first book. Native Science, had studied indigenous developmental traditions and come to the conclusion that everyone he's ever studied has at least three fundamental elements, and that's where this idea of individuation.

[00:53:53] Community and land come together and any two of the three by themselves become distorted. Individuation without community becomes individualism. Community without individuation becomes tyranny. The oppression of the individual by the whole, but individuation and community without land becomes human centrism.

[00:54:18] So that's why you gotta have all three.

[00:54:21] **Jonathan Rose:** But in that case, land is not individual ownership of land. It is deep relationship to land and all the other siblings that are upon it.

[00:54:32] **Peter Senge:** So you've gotta qualify each, and that's why people who are individuation, they think it's individualism. No it's not. People hear community, they think, oh, well, it's all of us feeling good about each other.

[00:54:40] No, it's not. People here land they think property meaning, that's our confusion. We've lost all three. But I think the core of the teaching is. You either get all three or you get none of the three. And they're all portals. The way we've been kind of, I've been trying to write about this and share it in a way that will make sense to people.

[00:55:02] If you think of it as a manic space, these are the different portals into the space. I mean, we, we have our own paths, we have our own preferences, we have our own needs, our learning edges right now, right? So we enter in different ways, but all it is, is a space, it's a whole, it's an ethical field. If we understand as such, then it's not about the elements, it's not about the individual portals.

[00:55:26] It's about being in that hole and knowing that, you know, we have our own past. So, um. The, the one thing that, and I, I still haven't had a chance to check this with Greg. I have a

real task. You're hearing my little bit of guilt right now. I've gotta figure out a way to do this. Greg can be hard to reach, uh, but I know now way to get through 'em.

[00:55:47] I think so, anyhow, I've gotta check with him. So, because of us entering this Anthropocene era right now, I, I think you could argue that these three were vital and common to indigenous traditions for 30, 40, 50,000 years. But they were all local, right? They could screw up their environment for sure, but it was a local screw up of a local environment.

[00:56:16] That's not us today. We can, so I, I think it's legitimate, and this is why I wanna ask Greg Howie is okay with him? Did we say no? Now there's a fourth portal also, which is Earth,

[00:56:27] **Jonathan Rose:** and maybe in his mind, land was earth. So maybe, maybe each one of these. Just expands. Um, that's up for you and him to discern.

[00:56:39] But it seems to me that that Gaia, that land, land is bounded when it's not Gaia. But when it's Gaia, you know, when it's the whole earth, then it's just the unbounded version of land.

[00:56:55] **Peter Senge:** That's right. Well, just so you say, make the same mind about individual and community.

[00:56:58] **Jonathan Rose:** Yes. Right,

[00:56:59] **Peter Senge:** right. When you really hold the two, are you individual, are you community?

[00:57:04] The answer is always yes.

[00:57:06] **Jonathan Rose:** Right,

[00:57:06] **Peter Senge:** right. So the, the, the boundaries start to dissolve and it starts to become a space or a field rather than just an idea of individuation. So yeah, I, I think that's a very good way to put it. Uh, I think that this is now a, a different era and all three of them will take on different kind of, they'll span, as you said, because, you know, we did an interview with Greg.

[00:57:32] Three years ago that started this journey off and building around his ideas. He said, you know, and very cyclically, Greg's a very direct guy. He said, you know, humans will become indigenous again, or we won't make it. And what does it mean to be indigenous? Doesn't mean you become a Blackfoot Indian or a Samami or whatever.

[00:57:50] It means you start to embrace the totality of these developmental portals. They're accessible to all of us. And now in the context of earth awareness.

[00:58:03] **Jonathan Rose:** Mm-hmm.

[00:58:04] **Peter Senge:** So of course that opens up the door to a lot of people have been talking like that for a long time. Back to ARD and the whole, the work of Brian Swift Genesis,

you know, so there's some pretty good, relatively recent, but pretty good Western lineages to build on just as there are in the other two.

[00:58:23] And of course, as Westerners, we need those. We need to find paths that we can understand a little bit more. The way, you know, a South American shaman enters Earth as a portal of development, the way you and I enter, it's gonna be different naturally. 'cause we represent different lineages. So, uh, the Cosmo genesis work, I think is a great example and we'll, we'll try to integrate that into all this, uh, Lou Bryan and the, and the people we're working at the California Institute of Integral Studies that Brian helped found.

[00:58:56] But of course, I've always been really interested in tele art and got to know Tom Berry just a little bit. I never got to know him well, but Thomas Berry is, those of you who don't know was the president of the Tel de Charna society and had his own way of expressing this kind of moment in history. Very important guy.

[00:59:13] And of course, Mary Evelyn has become a friend just in the last, uh, few years. So it's there to build out.

[00:59:22] **Jonathan Rose:** Interesting. Uh, I'm gonna bring this to a close. What's interesting to me is that the, this series is called The Common Good and it's, it's our search for the common good. And, and now what I've realized is there is no difference between the ethical field and the common good.

[00:59:44] And the common good is just more western language to say the same thing. Well, Peter, it's been a tremendous joy. Uh, just listening to you has been really great and I look forward to seeing you next week.

[00:59:58] **Peter Senge:** Isn't that neat? We get to say see you next week. That doesn't happen often.

[01:00:02] **Jonathan Rose:** Yeah.

[01:00:02] **Peter Senge:** I look forward to seeing you next week.

[01:00:04] **Jonathan Rose:** Great. Thank you. Thank you so much. This was really great.

[01:00:07] **Peter Senge:** You're welcome.

[01:00:13] **Jonathan Rose:** Thank you to our guest. Peter Senge. The Common Good is a production of the Garrison Institute and is hosted by me, Jonathan FP Rose. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast. Please send us a note at [podcast@garrisoninstitute.org](mailto:podcast@garrisoninstitute.org) and let us know what you think. If you've enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a positive review on Apple Podcasts.

[01:00:37] This show is produced by the Garrison Institute with production and marketing from the Podglomerate. Its theme music was composed by Jonathan FP Rose, and performed by Jog Blues. We look forward to being with you again soon.