

Gina LaRoche and Jen Cohen

*Living in Our Money-Driven Society: Navigating the Path to Awakening*

Week One: “Context, Scarcity, Debt, and Secrets”

July 2, 2022



**Gina LaRoche:** St. Teresa of Avila says, “This magnificent refuge is inside you. Enter. Shatter the darkness that shrouds the doorway. Be bold. Be humble. Put away the incense and forget the incantations they taught you. Ask no permission from the authorities. Close your eyes and follow your breath to the still place that leads to the invisible path that leads you home.”

Welcome to “Living in Our Money-Driven Society: Navigating a Pathway to Awakening.” My name is Gina LaRoche. I’m a cofounder of Seven Stones Leadership Group. I came to the dharma about 12 years ago when I walked into Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts for my first meditation retreat. I was hooked from the first weekend and have spent the last decade cultivating a practice in connection to the dharma.

**Jen Cohen:** My name is Jen Cohen, and Gina and I are partners at Seven Stones Leadership Group, our company, which brings many of the principles of this set of teachings into the way we teach leadership. I started a vipassana meditation practice almost 30 years ago. It was an assignment for a year-long course that I was in, and I really have been deep in the practice ever since my first 10-day meditation retreat in 1995. I’ve had an ongoing practice and retreat practice for 30 years since then, and I weave those practices and teachings into the way I coach and work with clients.

**Gina LaRoche:** We’ve designed this course to be a series of conversations over a four-week period. We’ll start this week with a conversation around context. We’ll then move into the two truths and how money and the relative truth and ultimate truth are aligned. For Week 3, we will do an exercise we call “break free from the money trap.” And finally, we will end with a conversation about the pathway toward awakening through the 10 *paramis*, or perfections. We’ll use *dana*, or generosity, as the pathway through all four weeks of the session.

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**Jen Cohen:** Alright, so here we are in Week 1. We want to talk a little bit about context. In our work, we say that context is decisive. What we mean by that is that the context that we live in is invisibly shaping our thinking, our way of being, and our behaviors. It’s like the water that we’re swimming in. You might have seen that cartoon where one fish says to the other fish, “How’s the water today?” and the other fish says “What water?”

Context is like the water that we’re swimming in. There are many contexts, and the context around money in our society is what is called a context of scarcity. Our mentor and colleague Lynne Twist got this from Buckminster Fuller. There are three major myths or belief structures that undergird a system of scarcity, and Lynne articulated these myths in her book, *The Soul of Money*. I’ll talk about each of these myths, and then I’ll say a little bit about dana and an alternate context for us to live in.

The first of the three myths of scarcity is “There is not enough.” There is just not enough to go around. The second myth is “More is better.” Lynne just said “More is better,” but we like to say “More is always better.” And the third myth, which may be the most toxic of the three, is “That’s just the way that it is.” There’s not enough to go around, having more is always better, and this is just the way that it is.

The thing about context when it becomes the water is any context just looks like it’s the way that it is. But it isn’t. Somebody made all that up. *Somebodies* made all that up. We made up the system of money. We made up money. And the context for money and our economic model is scarcity driven, debt driven, deprivation driven, and withholding driven. All those things drive how we make commodities and how we withhold commodities from the marketplace, and it has infected the way we think about everything.

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Dana, or generosity, which was one of the major teachings of the Buddha and a major pillar of the ethical path, comes from a really different context. It comes from a context of interdependence and reciprocity. It comes from a context in which the monks and the nuns and the laypeople were holding each other up. It comes from a context in which there was a sense that everybody was doing their part, and if we practiced generosity toward one another, all beings would benefit. *All* of us would benefit. The system was based on benefiting all beings and having our attention on benefiting all beings. That’s not the system we’re marinating in. I’ll give it over to Gina to say a little bit more about what holds our system together.

**Gina LaRoche:** Particularly around money, secrets and lies hold our system together. We have secrets about how much money we earn or how much debt we have or how close we are to the edge or maybe how bountiful money is for us. If we have a trust fund or inherited wealth, we like to keep all that a secret. We believe that this secrecy really does keep us from walking our path toward awakening, so we have designed our company and our work around pulling back the layers of secrets and lies to tell the truth about money and the truth about our economic system to guide us forward to a context that we call sustainable abundance.

**Jen Cohen:** Let me say a little bit more about secrets and lies. We would say that it’s the glue that holds together a system of scarcity: a lack of truth in the space, a lack of information, and a lack of sharing freely. Did you hear me say lack three times? Lack, scarcity, not enough. There are a lot of different kinds of glue that keep the system together, but secrecy is a huge piece of the glue that keeps a system of scarcity in operation. It keeps us in a state of greed and grasping, and it keeps us in a state of delusion so we’re never in reality with one another about the most basic thing that organizes our society. When people don’t have information, when people don’t have truth, when people aren’t freely sharing with one another, we can’t move, we can’t create, and we can’t see clearly. If the path is about seeing clearly, this keeps us away from seeing clearly.

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**Gina LaRoche:** As we navigate this path forward together, we like to start with a conversation around our stories about money, where they came from, and what your parents or grandparents were saying to you at home. We hold those stories well into adulthood, and they may be invisible to us.

**Jen Cohen:** The story really is the fabric of context. Said another way, the story is what grows into what we think of as the truth or the way things actually are, and then the story recedes into the background, and it just turns into “This is the way that it is.” “The way that it is” might be “Money is the root of all evil.”

**Gina LaRoche:** Or “Don’t tell anyone that you have a trust fund because they’ll come after you.”

**Jen Cohen:** “They’ll only want you for your money.” Or “Never tell your friends what I make.” All of that becomes the water that we’re swimming in, and it’s really born from greed, hatred, delusion, and a sense of separateness. Scarcity is rooted in separation.

**Gina LaRoche:** So as we look toward next week, take this conversation around the myths and the context around scarcity and generosity, and think about your own stories: where they came from, who spoke them to you, how you think about money, and how you think about wealth. What does that mean to you? Next week, when we come back, we will dive into the two truths and how to sort through the relative truth and the ultimate truth when it comes to money.