

N.10 • Spring 2023

EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine

A close-up photograph of a bee on a pink flower. The bee is positioned in the center of the frame, facing left, with its head and antennae near the center of the flower. The flower has several long, thin stamens with yellow tips. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text 'ECODHARMA' is overlaid on a dark green horizontal band across the middle of the image.

ECODHARMA

Contents

Ecodharma	8
Buddhism meets the Climate Crisis	10
Wisdom Working for the Earth	20
The Way of the Ecosattva	28
Is Ecodharma (always) Buddhist?	38
Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au	44
Buddhists and climate change in practice	48
Ecoselves: towards a spiritual and cultural transformation?	52
Being the Change: EBU and the Sustainable Environment on Earth for All Beings	62
What Ecodharma Means to Me	68
Nature, Mindfulness, Ecology The culture of harmony	78





**“ Ecodharma and the way of the
ecosattva is a central way of
Buddhism in modern times. ”**

Jake Lyne

Introducing our writers



Dr Jake Lyne is an experienced Chan Retreat Leader with the Western Chan Fellowship and a retired Clinical Psychologist. He is one of the coordinators of the EBU Ecodharma Network and seeks to raise awareness of the extreme seriousness of the risks we and all species on earth are facing, and therefore of the need for urgent and determined action. He is married to Jan, who shares his interest in ecodharma, and they have three grown up children. In his leisure time he is interested in sailing and astrophysics and runs marathons for charity.



Joe Mishan is a psychotherapist in private practice and a meditation teacher in the Vipassana tradition. He is co-founder of DANCE London (Dharma Action Network for Climate Engagement) and Extinction Rebellion Buddhists. More recently he has become active in the Deep Adaptation movement.



Carla Ott. Having been raised by a Buddhist mother, Carla started to fall in love with Buddhism from a young age onwards. She recently completed a Master degree in Buddhist Studies at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Nepal and now lives in France, where she is part of the environmental committee of Lerab Ling, a temple and retreat centre of the Tibetan Buddhist Nyingma tradition. Fascinated by the process of how Buddhist traditions are responding and adapting to contemporary landscapes and issues (which was the topic of her thesis) combined with her deep appreciation for nature, she helped to organise the first Wisdom Working for the Earth Forum bringing together Buddhist and environmental wisdom, which took place in Lerab Ling in June 2022.



Dr Michael Vermeulen is a philosopher, medical doctor and religious-studies scholar. From 2011 to 2015 he was the representative of the EBU to the European Union, after which he became chair of the EBU Rainbow Sangha. He has been a speaker on several UN conferences on topics related to Human Rights, Queer Buddhism and Buddhist Environmentalism. (mmdv68-ebufilo@yahoo.co.uk)



Silvia Francescon is the Head of the Ecological Program at the Italian Buddhist Union and Fellow at the New Institute Center for International Humanities (NICHE) at Cà Foscari University in Venice, where she is conducting research on Buddhism, Deep Ecology and the Rights of Nature. Silvia extensively worked for international and Italian institutions: OECD, WTO, European Commission. She was negotiator for Italy for several international environmental agreements at the Ministry for the Environment and coordinator of the G8/G7/G20 Task Force at the Italian Prime Minister's Office. She also directed the Millennium Campaign of the United Nations and the Rome Office of the European Council on Foreign Relations. Silvia is the co-founder of EquALL and Women in International Security. She is the happy mother of Giovanni and Sofia, a mountains lover, a certified yoga teacher and has been a dharma practitioner for the last 30+ years.



Johannes Cairns Jhānasubho is a Buddhist monk who used to work as an academic researcher.



Olivia Fuchs has been practicing and studying Buddhism for over 30 years and is a local London-based women's leader in the Buddhist lay organisation, Soka Gakkai International (SGI). She is a Research Fellow of the Centre for Applied Buddhism with a MA in 'Reconciliation and Peacebuilding' from Winchester University. Since 2019 she has been the project coordinator of the Eco Dharma Network in the UK, part of Faith for the Climate and EBU Eco Dharma, as well as being involved in Interfaith climate action. During COP26 she was the climate lead for SGI-UK and organised a series of side events on the Climate Fringe. Olivia is an international award-winning opera and theatre director, and continues her freelance career while pursuing her passion for interfaith work, climate action and social change.

Introducing our writers



Karolina Ek is the assistant project manager for the SEE-FAB project, working on behalf of SEfficiency. She has an international background and experience working with youth and community engagement. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Sustainability Science in Sweden together with Lydia.



Lydia von Gertten currently works on her master's thesis project at the Sustainability Studies and Environmental Science program of Lund University. In addition to her strong love for animals, she explores ways to more effectively integrate ecological concerns into urban planning.



Jacob 'Jōshin' Halcomb, through the consultancy SEfficiency, serves as a technical advisor for the project. His expertise is in sustainability science, facilities, and resource efficiency and environmental management. He remains grateful for the strong interest and commitment of the EBU in pursuing this project.



Diana Warner is 63, of Jewish background. She lived in Thailand for her first two and half years, and was told that she learned Thai hand dancing there. The family then moved to North London. Diana has lived in Bristol for most of her adult life. Diana started meditating at the age of forty, and took the Buddhist lay vows about ten years later. Diana retired from General Practice on her sixtieth birthday. She considers that she has not stopped working as a doctor but has only changed tack, determined to work alongside others to safeguard our children's health. Diana has two children, who are her most stalwart friends and supporters.



Frédéric la Combe (Lama Lhündroup): Dharma instructor and mindfulness facilitator, translator, graduate of a master's degree in Chinese, after having lived several years in China, he made a three-year retreat in the Tibetan tradition under the guidance of Denys Rinpoche. He has been working in the service of the Buddha's teachings and the Buddha University for the past twenty years. Organizer of numerous inter-tradition meetings in a humanist vision of unity in diversity, he is interested in the meeting of the Buddha's wisdom with our life today, particularly in the fields of deep ecology and others.



Emilia Amalā Raunio is a junior Dharma teacher in the Bodhidharma association, Helsinki. As a background in food science her interest is to heal the world together with our everyday actions. Emilia is a council member of EBU and also one of the hosts in EBU's European Buddha Podcast. She enjoys walks in the forest, swimming in all kinds of waters and there is always place for a cup of green tea moment.



Ron Eichhorn is the president of the European Buddhist Union and a head disciple of the Supreme Matriarch Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim. He is abbot of the Berlin temple of the Yun Hwa Sangha and a professional film director. In his spare time, he likes to go sailing and plays the Ukulele.

Editorial

Go for it!

As a teaching, Buddhism is fundamentally about mind.

"Everything is created by mind alone" states the Flower Ornament Sutra, one of the central Mahayana scriptures. On a practical and empirical level, we can easily realize that, before words or actions, there are thoughts. The thought of wanting to help others and create a better, more beautiful world is worth having, especially if we follow it up with action.

"Eco Dharma" is what we call our Buddhist endeavors related to ecology and the climate crisis within the EBU, because we are looking to minimize our impact on the climate, and engage in a positive, supportive manner, by following the Dharma, which is the teaching of the Buddha.

Buddhism is also Storytelling. This is true since the very beginning when the Buddha taught people in various ways. How a story is told, makes a difference in how we relate to it, if we remember it, and how it possibly affects our life.

The story, that the world will come to an end, is as old as humanity, it came in many versions. Somehow, we are still here, which is why most of us don't believe that the world is doomed. But climate change is a real threat, and our impact as humans on the Ecosystems of the world is part of the problem. This is indeed one of the important stories of our time.

Still, many people don't listen, are not involved, and are even bored with this story. Would it help if we tell it more loudly if we scream it into people's faces? If we use bigger letters on bigger signposts? Or if more people would glue themselves to streets and pieces of art?

I very much doubt that. I think we have to change the way we tell the story, as a narrative. It is not a matter of being more aggressive and it will not help to patronize others.

In this current issue of our EBU Magazine, we want to find successful ways of telling the story, so people will listen. We want to create the thought, that all of us are part of the problem and also part of the solution.

Jake Lyne (p.28) gives us very good information and facts about our ecological footprint as humans in what we call the Holocene, as well as what we can do to reduce it. **Dr. Michael Vermeulen** (p.38) highlights that ecological awareness was at the very heart of early Buddhism. **Silvia Francescon** (p.44) emphasizes the rights of Nature, while **Olivia Fuchs** (p.52) points out that modern humans have alienated themselves from our natural habitat. **Joshin Halcomb**, **Karolina Ek**, and **Lydia von Gertten** were giving a wonderful workshop about the SEE-FAB project (p.62) during our last annual meeting, which was very informative and inspiring, so I am happy that they also contributed to these texts.

This is a rich and beautiful magazine, with many more meaningful contributions. It is our most comprehensive issue so far, and certainly one of the most meaningful ones. I hope you enjoy reading it, spread the word and be active!

Sincerely,



Ron Eichhorn
European Buddhist Union
President

Editorial

Reading the news today may leave us hopeless and sad among other things. No doubt we are living the most dangerous time in the history of humanity. Ecological crisis is one of the biggest challenges the world has faced. As Buddhism has always been about waking up, we hope this issue will help you wake up in a new way, alleviate the pain and hopelessness and to see the possibilities Buddhist teachings and values can help with responding to this crisis. This is why we wanted to dedicate our spring issue to this extremely important topic, topic of Ecodharma.

We hope you will enjoy our latest issue and if you have any feedback or are interested in joining the magazine work don't hesitate to contact!

Love

Emilia Amalā Raunio
European Buddhist Union
Editor in chief and Council member
magazine@europeanbuddhism.org

ECODHARMA



By Jake Lyne

We have been changing the world dramatically for 70 years or more. Scientists have been warning of the implications of these changes with increasing precision ever since 1988 when the International Panel for Climate Change was inaugurated.

But climate change has always seemed to be some way off or somewhere else for most people living in the Northern Hemisphere, until now. Now we are beginning to see that the effects are everywhere and intensifying.

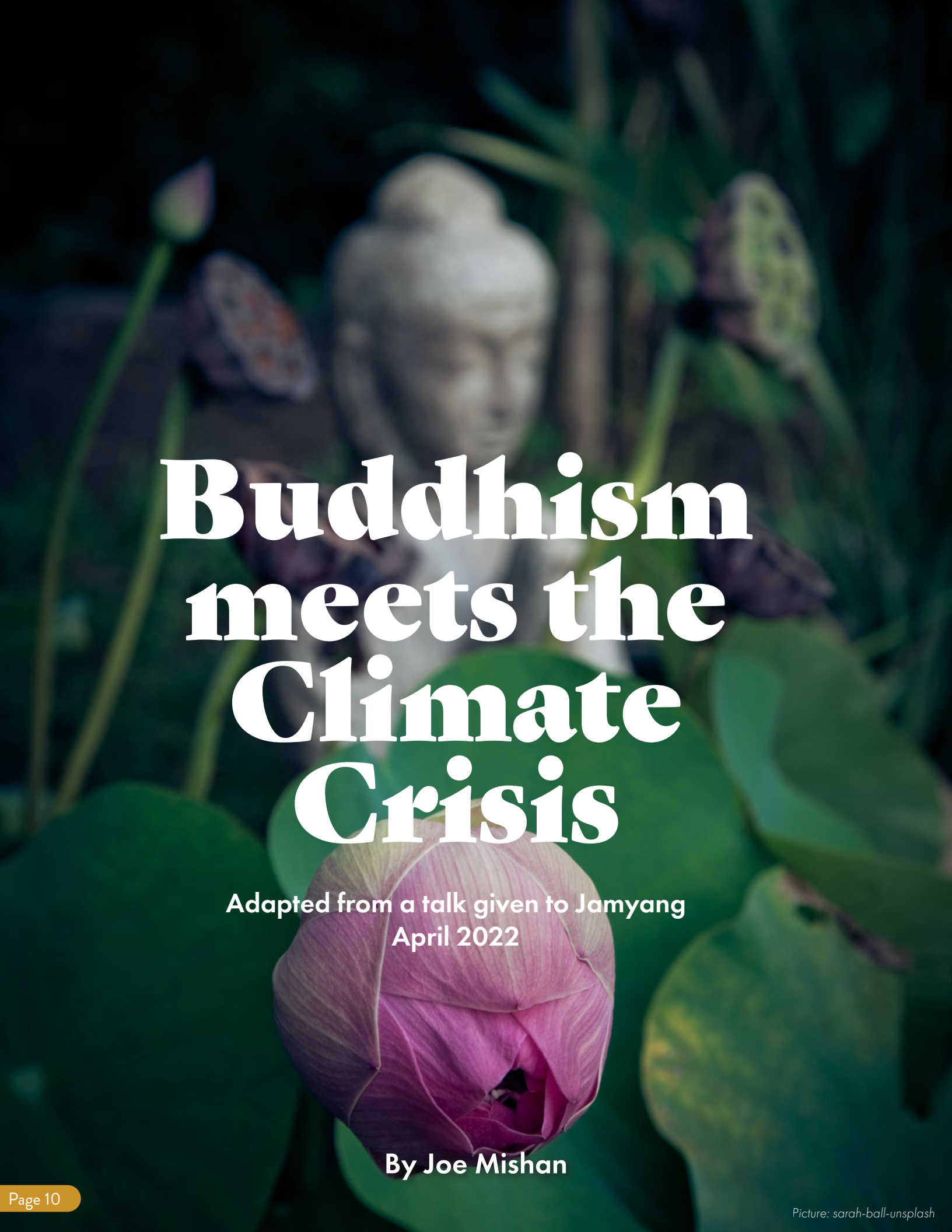
There is no place for allowing complacency, denial, despair or hopelessness to be the drivers of our response to what is happening. It is true that the signs are not

good, indeed they are deeply alarming, but if we in our mostly privileged circumstances do not make use of every means at our disposal to reduce pollution either directly or through social and political influence, what use are we to those who face the full force of climate change already, or will do in the future?

The way of the ecosattva is to face up to the harm pollution of all kinds (CO₂, methane, plastics, chemicals etc.) are doing to life on earth and act with energy and determination, choosing whatever skilful means are available to try to find a healthy way for us to live with our fellow sentient beings on earth. Skilful means are means that are consistent with

the Buddhist path of awakening, wisdom and compassion.

During his lifetime, the Buddha's teaching was a response to one of the great problems of the times – how to bring an ethical framework with an emphasis on personal responsibility to religion, at a time when spiritual progress was thought to depend on satisfying the gods with animal sacrifices and precise repetition of rituals. One of the greatest problems of our times is climate change and the other related problems of pollution, which are compounded by problems of inequity between people and between humans and other species. Ecodharma and the way of the ecosattva is a central way of Buddhism in modern times. 🧘

The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a pond. In the center, a white Buddha statue is visible, surrounded by large green lotus leaves and pink lotus flowers. The text is overlaid on this image.

Buddhism meets the Climate Crisis

Adapted from a talk given to Jamyang
April 2022

By Joe Mishan

I think this is very helpful. To respond appropriately we need to really meet the crisis: which means to be fully awake to its reality. And the 'each' is that we need to notice and respond to its particularities; not to confuse it with just the average crisis. And the 'teach' part: we need to learn what we can from it. All these elements are interconnected and combine to give us a clearer platform from we can respond proportionally, effectively and with wisdom.

Meeting the crisis

It is of course understandable that we find ourselves often, maybe more often than not, not wanting to meet the crisis at all. To really face into the immensity, complexity, and mortal implications of the climate and ecological emergency is a continual challenge. We may understandably find ourselves wanting to escape into the myriad distractions our culture offers; into consuming, into our endless proliferating social media, and of course Netflix. In other words, into business as usual, which assumes that the future will look pretty much like the past.

But ignorance or denial in the face of this crisis is a terminal disease. This is surely a tragedy given our capacity as a species for brilliance, for endurance and courage, for creativity, wisdom and love, so evident in so many fields and in so many cultures. The recent response to the Covid 19 pandemic was a powerful example of our capacity for adaptation, stoicism and generosity.

I would like to make the case that Buddhists are highly qualified to meet this crisis. I will be speaking mainly from a Buddhist perspective because this is what I am most familiar with, but I want to bow to the deep wisdom of other ancient traditions and cultures, often marginalised by our culture, who hold a deep reverence for the earth, and wisdom and skill in living on it.

The first level of meeting this crisis is to acknowledge the facts of the crisis.

I will limit myself to saying that, even at the current global temperature increase of 1.1°C we are already experiencing life-changing impacts on people and on our ecosystems. Yet current policies presently in place around the world are projected to result in about 2.7°C to 5°C warming by the end of the century. These temperatures are barely survivable.

Antonio Guterres the UN secretary general said at the COP27 climate summit last year:

'We are in the fight of our lives, and we are losing. We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.'

James Hansen former director of NASA, has said that the Earth's warming has: "brought us to the precipice of a great tipping point. If we go over the edge, it will be a transition to a different planet; an environment far outside the range that has been experienced by humanity. There will be no return within the lifetime of any generation that can be imagined, and it will

There's an old Zen story, from 9th Century China, which is characteristically pithy and somewhat challenging to unravel. In it a student approaches his master who is coming to the end of his life, and asks: "What is the goal of a lifetime of practice?" I suppose the student was hoping for some final revelation before his master passed on. But what came back was brief and apparently mundane. His master said: "An appropriate response."

I would like to attempt to unravel this koan as an orientation as to how to respond (rather than react), to the climate and ecological crisis. What in our faith tradition speaks to this, and can hold us, as we face into this existential emergency?

Zen teacher Pamela Wiess provides some insight into the what 'appropriate response' might mean. She says that the word appropriate is a condensation of three words in Chinese which are: 'meet', 'each' and 'teach'.



Picture: justus-menke-unsplash

exterminate a large fraction of species on the planet”

There is little doubt in the minds of many in the scientific community that we are facing major social, economic and ecosystem collapse, whatever global action we now take: this is because a tipping points - the Amazon rainforest, the Ice sheets in Greenland and West Antarctica, permafrost in Siberia have been activated. For example melting sea ice in the Arctic reveals a darker surface and attracts more heat which melts more ice becoming a self-perpetuating loop. It really doesn't get much more urgent than this. Many of us may feel deep dismay and desperation when we see the lack of urgency in government, in the media, and in the financial and fossil fuel sectors.

This is the result of many influences. The large oil corporations Exxon and Shell have been highly effective in spreading

disinformation on climate to reduce action. Governments are disinclined to pass legislation that might be unpopular and in any case do not concern themselves with much beyond the election cycles. For the media the climate crisis is not good copy. Climate change is an ongoing relatively slowly unfolding catastrophe and so rarely meets criteria for newsworthiness. Although individual weather events such as intense storms might gain a few minutes of air time, there is no regular coverage on mainstream media joining the dots and into a clear picture of an unfolding disaster. From an evolutionary perspective, our brains are not evolved to respond to threats which are not immediate, that don't seem intentional, or immoral (like terrorist threats), and which are not clearly visible. Climate change, deforestation, soil erosion and species extinction - these are all relatively slow and invisible if you

are not looking directly. We come downstairs in the morning and it all looks pretty normal - the sun is shining and there's the cat and the cornflakes... and of course no one else seems to be panicking so why should we? This is the so-called bystander effect: inaction breeds inaction.

It seems the first thing we need to do then is to wake up and to stay awake.

This is not just a matter of being told the facts: these are relatively well known and accepted. What does Buddhism have to say about waking up and facing the reality of our predicament? The Buddhists among you may be feeling rather smug at this point: Buddhism is all about waking up you may be thinking! And of course you are right.

‘Budh’ means ‘awake’ in Pali: so Buddhism might be described as ‘awakeism’. But what are the practices that help us to do this?

A photograph of a penguin standing on a vast, flat, white ice field. In the background, a snow-capped mountain rises against a pale sky. The foreground shows a large, textured ice formation with a blueish tint, possibly a glacier edge or a large ice floe. The overall scene is cold and desolate.

**‘Budh’ means ‘awake’ in Pali:
so Buddhism might be
described as ‘awake-ism’.**

What in our practice and in our teachings holds us so that we can wake up to the unthinkable immensity of this crisis? I would like to point to two main qualities which are crucial in allowing us to do so. These are two of the four brahmavihārās: compassion and equanimity.

To start with compassion. It is compassion that orientates us to turn toward suffering rather than away. Here we are in the territory of the Bodhisattva, in particular of the deity Avalokiteshvara: she who hears the cries of the world. In many illustrations she is depicted with one of her legs extended, ready to rise to respond to the suffering of the world. Compassion has been described as the quivering of the heart in response to suffering. And it motivates us

to act. As we do so we must hold our own suffering with equal tenderness: our anguish, our anger our anxiety numbness and dismay. No part left out. In this way we reduce the possibility of burnout which is an affliction common among activists.

Compassion orientates us away from the immediate need to fix or solve (although this certainly has its place), so that we can provide a resting place, a home, for the reality of what we and others feel. This is what is referred to in western psychology as 'containment': a reference to the embracing arms of the mother holding an infant with loving care. It is from this more settled place that we can respond more effectively and wisely.

Compassion is not always soft and caring however. It can be

fierce. And this is brought to us by another deity, the Bodhisattva Vajrapani, the embodiment of 'fierce compassion'. The figure of Vajrapani exudes flames and stands in the warrior pose. Fierce compassion edges closer to the energy of anger, but it is not anger, because fierce compassion is rooted not in the motivation to cause harm, but by the motivation to protect what is vulnerable to harm. This quality has particular relevance to activism. It offers a root for action that is powerful, determined and explicit without being aggressive.

In the lived experience of compassion there is a strong connection to equanimity. Feldman and Kuyken [1] write:

'Compassion is a multi-textured response to pain, sorrow and



anguish..... The strands of courage, tolerance, equanimity are equally woven into the cloth of compassion.'

Equanimity comes at the end of the list of the Bramavirahas. This is because it holds or contains the others: it invites us to stay with, to make room for whatever is arising. There is a quality of fearlessness in this, conferred by its proximity to compassion.

In the open landscape of equanimity we may find our capacity to hold and allow the pain of awakening to the crisis, while the resonance of the compassionate heart moves us to do what we can to relieve the suffering of the world. And so the balancing energies of wisdom and love make it possible for us to remain resilient and responsive.

Each: meeting this particular crisis

Turning now to the 'each' element of 'meet' 'each' 'teach'. Meeting this crisis as discussed above with open hearts and minds leads into the 'teach': it reveals what is unique, and what is familiar.

There may be a temptation to react to the crisis as though it is just another issue of the many pressing issues of our time. One which we might want to discuss or not depending on whether one is an 'environmentalist' or not, or a nature lover, or an activist. Watching the news inevitably conveys it in just this way: another storm, another drought, another COP, just another story before

we move on to an item about the royal family or a political scandal. Conveyed in this way there is an implied equality with other news stories. Except this not an issue like any other: this is about our very survival and the survival of life on Earth. As the title of Noami Klein's 2014 book says: 'This Changes Everything'. Nothing can be the same now.

There is literally nowhere on Earth, and no species on Earth that will escape the impacts of the collapse of essential ecosystems, and possible extinction; and this within the lifetime of people alive today. We need a deep reassessment of the way we lead our lives, the way we think and relate to the Earth and each other. There is no alternative, no get out clause, no bargaining our way out of it. We meet it, we see its uniqueness so that we can respond with the urgency required or we take refuge in ignorance and delusion with catastrophic, potentially terminal consequences.

Buddhism did not develop at a time when life on Earth was in jeopardy, but it nevertheless has passed down practices that help us to wake up and stay awake in the face of mortality. It encourages us to use our practice to face into the reality of our personal death. Larry Rosenberg has this to say about meditation on death:

'The contemplation of death is a wisdom practice. Wisdom has to do with seeing clearly, seeing things as they are, that is, coming to terms with the way things are. This contemplation is a wisdom practice in that it begins to direct

and cultivate thinking that's in alignment with the way things are and, in particular, the way our body is, the lawfulness that our body is subject to.'

In developing a capacity to face our own ageing and death we appreciate in an intimate way the lawfulness of anicca. All things change. All things die and are reborn: people, civilisations, planets, solar systems, universes etc.

And so our appreciation of the uniqueness of our time opens us into the universal. The appreciation that the possible extinction we are facing is, on a geological time-scale yet another collapse of life on Earth which has happened on five previous occasions. The Earth is not in danger and will endure; life will rise again, perhaps from the human equivalent of a bad bout of flu. This is the balance offered by the absolute dimension. Billions of beings on this planet are or will experience incalculable suffering, and many species, possibly including our own, will go extinct. And: all things in this universe are inherently impermanent: everything that is born will die, back into the vast mystery from which it emerged.

Joanna Macy speaks of the wonder of this mystery. She writes:

To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe - to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it - is a wonder beyond words.

Holding in our hearts the suffering of this world and its inherent transience and insubstantiality we

tread a path of love and wisdom which is inherently open and resilient.

Teach: what can this crisis teach us?

For those who are willing to look, there are many things that this crisis is holding up to the light.

We might point to the priorities of our political, corporate and media establishments which make them unwilling or unable to respond effectively. There is increasingly undeniable evidence that the radical change we need will not come from the power elite, but from the collective power of the millions of engaged citizens, NGOs and activist groups rising like a tide across the planet. The so-called Deep Adaptation movement [2] believe that the resilience conferred by a strong community will be an essential contributor to our species survival.

Buddhists have a particular reverence for the collective,

expressed as the third of the three jewels - the Sangha. People tend to seek out the faith communities at times of crisis. For example during the COVID-19 pandemic, online searches for the word "prayer" soared to their highest level ever in over 90 countries; and this is also the case in times of war or conflict. So our community is well placed, along with other faith groups, to provide a community and spiritual base for the population as our systems move towards chaos and collapse.

Perhaps however, we might identify a more fundamental teaching offered by the the climate crisis. So-called human exceptionalism, or anthropomorphism, influenced by the Abrahamic religions, and by the primacy of economic growth, has oiled the wheels of ruthless exploitation of our planet and the species who inhabit it.

From a Buddhist frame human exceptionalism is based on ignorance of the way things

are. Buddhism teaches that all things are interconnected, in a mutually influencing system. This is dependent co-arising - or interdependence: "if this exists, that exists; if this ceases to exist, that also ceases to exist". There is no independently existing essence of self (anatta): the apparently separate self is one level of reality only - relative reality. From an absolute perspective we and everything else in the universe are embedded within a web of causes and conditions. Thích Nhất Hạnh describes this as 'interbeing'; we 'inter-are' with each other, with the Earth, with everything else. Systems theory, the Gaia Hypothesis and many traditional cultures also understand reality in this way. Quantum Physics is also showing us this. Henry Stapp, a physicist specialising in quantum mechanics. Writes:

'An elementary particle is not an independently existing entity. It is, in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things.'



This crisis is teaching us the life-threatening costs of our ignorance of this fact. Perhaps the most glaring, institutionalised embodiment of this reality is our economic theory, which promotes endless economic growth and the potential of the free market. This forms an integral part of an engine of destruction which is threatening life on Earth.

In her book 'Doughnut Economics' [3] Kate Hayworth writes:

'For over 70 years economics has been fixated on GDP, or national output, as its primary measure of progress. The fixation has been used to justify extreme inequalities of income and wealth coupled with unprecedented destruction of the living world.' (p25)

This delusion of independence, is being challenged by intensifying weather events and dire scientific predictions. It is increasingly obvious that that our cities, our shopping malls, our cars and all the glittering promise of modernity do not confer protection from the impacts of a destabilised climate. Film footage of houses and towns swept away by floods or razed by wildfires makes this startlingly obvious. This is showing us in unmistakable terms that our obsession with the isolated metric of economic growth cannot be sustained in a living system; limitless growth, like cancer, kills the organism on which it grows.

The mantra of growth is also being challenged by a growing number of campaigners and activists who are moving into a more worshipful relationship to this living planet.

Inherent in this reverence is the realisation of interconnectedness with the Earth. Buddhism offers the means by which this truth might be realised beyond a simply cognitive understanding (although this is also important). The noble eight-old path is a road map to ethical living which has many similarities to the ethical life promoted by environmental organisations, which minimises harmful impacts on other beings. In the Theravada tradition, this path is summarised as sila (morality), samadhi (meditation) and prajna (insight).

The practice of meditation reveals the continual arising and passing away of phenomena that might otherwise seem substantial and permanent. As Joseph Goldstein has put it, in meditation we can witness 'empty phenomena rolling on'. This brings insight into the everflowing transitory nature of the world, the essential essence-lessness of it all. But it is 'sila' or morality which brings juice as it were, to this insight so that we do not remain simply dispassionate observers. If there is no separation between ourselves and other beings then compassion, which is the root of ethical behaviour, naturally arises. David Loy [4] has coined the term "ecco-sattva" as the modern manifestation of the Bodhisattva: one who lives in alignment with the calling of compassion and the ethical life.

Engaged Buddhism

I have explored the particular orientation Buddhism can bring to the climate crisis through the lens of an 'appropriate response'. How might Buddhists bring these rich offerings of wisdom and care into the world? I would like show how Extinction Rebellion Buddhists have been doing this for about four years as part of the wider Extinction Rebellion movement. But before doing so I would like to acknowledge the long and venerable history of Buddhist activism. The Buddha himself was very much engaged in politics and society, promoting women's equality, standing up against the caste system and opposing animal sacrifice. And it was Thich Nhất Hạnh who first used the term 'engaged Buddhism' in the 1960s during the Vietnam war, when his monastic community took the decision to take their practice into their wartorn country. There are many other Buddhist organisation who are engaged around the world, in protecting forests, setting up AIDS clinics working in hospices and prisons. In a discussion with Greta Thunberg in August last year the Dalai Lama said of the climate crisis:

'Prayer is not sufficient, we have to act. What happens depends on what we do.'

So to turn now to XR Buddhists, we have developed a form of protest which involves either walking or sitting meditation, or both. You will see here some examples of actions in London:



Comments from fellow activists in other groups suggest that our actions are both inspiring and calming. There is something very particular and impactful about a group of people sitting in silent contemplation in the midst of an often highly charged protest or on a busy city street; I think this is a manifestation of what the Buddha meant when he described Buddhism and Buddhist practice as 'against the stream'.

Before and after our actions we gather to meditate, to connect with our group and to ourselves. We remind ourselves of our motivation for our action and of our deep commitment to our faith tradition. This helps to hold us in what are sometimes quite challenging circumstances, such as facing ranks of police or a hostile public.

It is my belief, based on my years of activism in XR, that Buddhists have at their disposal invaluable teachings that can stabilise and

sustain them. The perspectives of the absolute, of anicca and annata, can support our capacity for equanimity in the face of even this most existential of crises, while the relative perspective awakens our hearts into compassion from which powerful action can take shape in the world.

I would like to end with a quote from a friend in Extinction Rebellion Buddhists, published on our website:

'I think activism has helped me develop deeper metta, equanimity and even insight. I notice that I generally feel much less angry about these issues than I did. And I'm glad not to be so angry! Anger can be a positive energy for me, but can also take me into tiredness and depression.

'I've done a lot of reflecting on the impermanence of everyone and everything I love - including the beauty and impermanence of the natural world itself.

I've been almost forced to clarify: what do I really think, what are my values, what do I really care about? I've been almost forced to look after my heart, to nourish and connect with my spiritual inspiration - a deeper energy.

And my heart has opened, keeps opening more, to the power of sangha. The extraordinary beauty of other people's idealism, which inspires and sustains me.

I feel free, richer, happier, and more authentically myself. I do actually feel like I have been touching the Earth more - coming into a closer relationship with reality both internally and externally.'

And so in this way, guided by our wisdom teachings, and with the inspiration of the Bodhisattva before us, we offer ourselves to the world, as they say in Zen, with gift bestowing hands. 🙏



Picture: scott-evans-unsplash

[1] Feldman, C., & Kuyken, W. Compassion in the landscape of suffering. *Contemporary Buddhism*, (2011)12(1), 143-155

[2] see for example: Jem Bendell *Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy* Revised 2nd Edition Released July 27th 2020

[3] Kate Raworth *Doughnut Economics* Random House 2017

[4] David Loy *EcoDharma* Wisdom Publications 2018



Wisdom Working for the Earth

An Experience of the First Forum

By Carla Ott

How can we nurture inner resources like joy, confidence and peace that are necessary to face the climate emergency as well as to persevere in our ecological commitments? What can help us to deal with “eco-anxiety”, i.e. feeling overwhelmed, distressed or powerless in sight of the magnitude of the climate emergency? In which ways is Buddhist thought and practice relevant in addressing the great challenges of this time? And how can environmental and Buddhist wisdom work together in order to protect our planet?

These questions are the inspiration and guiding light for the initiative of the Wisdom Working for the Earth Forums. This series of events aims to bring together the practical wisdom present in both the environmental fields and Buddhist traditions with the wish that these approaches work together in the most fruitful way for the health of our earth and of all beings who depend on it (hence, the name “Wisdom Working for the Earth”, or “Sagesse pour la terre” in French).

The first forum in this series took place last June (4-6th June 2022)

in Lerab Ling - a Tibetan Buddhist retreat centre located in the lush green setting of the Natural Regional Park of the Haut-Languedoc in Southern France. This three-day event provided the occasion for people from all walks of life to come together and learn practical tools and wisdom from a rich number of environmental and Buddhist experts.

In this article we would like to share the genesis and experience of this first event and give you a flavour of the program, of what worked well and what future events can improve. We end with rejoicing in all the great efforts and with inviting you to organise similar events and perhaps join the next edition of the Wisdom Working for the Earth forum in 2024!

A seed had been growing...

For several years the wish to bring together Buddhist and environmental wisdom had been germinating in a number of nature lovers across the Rigpa Sangha. As it became increasingly obvious that the world is in a climate emergency, the motivation became stronger and stronger to reflect on and share tools that help to

address this emergency from a place of compassion and wisdom. At the end of the year 2020, this seed finally met with the right conducive circumstances - a dedicated group of people, the support of Lerab Ling and its environmental committee, and the synergy with a similar initiative by Rigpa's youth group, Rigpé Shyönnu. Nourished by these conditions, the seed began to grow into the concrete idea of organising a series of forums on Buddhism and Environmental Action in Lerab Ling.

The fruition into a rich three-day program on interdependence

After a growing period of around 17 months having been nurtured by the warm care of a wonderful and diverse team of fifteen, the first Wisdom Working for the Earth Forum finally came to fruition on the weekend of Pentecost in June 2022. By this time, it had grown into quite a large tree, taking the form of a three-day program filled with different kinds of activities: There were plenary talks in the morning, meditation in movement sessions



and a fair of local environmental associations during lunchtime, round table discussions in the afternoon followed by a number of parallel practical workshops and evening programs in nature.

The overarching theme of this first forum was interdependence - a fundamental concept in both ecological thinking and Buddhist philosophy. All different program elements approached interdependence through one or more of these following three angles: Seeing or recognizing interdependence, cultivating this perspective and acting in harmony with it. As some of you might have noticed, this structure is based on the three elements that define Buddhist practice: view, meditation and action. This informative, reflective and practical focus on interdependence proved to be a fruitful starting point for many discussions that sprang from the meeting of the audience with experts and practitioners from

a variety of environmental and Buddhist disciplines.

Overall 27 amazing speakers and workshop holders came to this forum and shared their perspectives of interdependence and its implications, guided deeper reflections on this topic and provided specific tools on how to act in harmony with interdependence. All the main plenary talks can be watched on Prajna Online (prajnaonline.org) both in English and French. In the

following, I will just highlight a few impressions of the main talks to give you a flavour of the type of dialogue this forum created.

Every morning we had the great fortune to have Ringu Tulku Rinpoche addressing the audience in person. He presented a Buddhist way of looking at the environment through the eyes of interdependence, replied to a number of deep questions coming from participants and encouraged each of us to not lose hope but to



try our best to act for the benefit of our world. He also introduced a video message that His Holiness the Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje recorded for the purpose of this forum and echoed the Karmapa's words that practising Dharma and working for the protection of the environment are not two different things - in fact, there is no better Dharma practice than protecting the environment because if we manage to prevent the degradation of our planet, it will benefit everyone living on this earth now and in future.

Further representing a Buddhist perspective, we had two senior teachers of the Rigpa Sangha opening and closing the forum. In his opening talk, Philippe Cornu contextualised Buddhism and its relation to ecology and environmental action and in her concluding talk, Dominique Side wove the main messages of each talk into an excellent summary and underlined what Buddhism can contribute to the dialogue with ecology, both philosophically and practically.

Bringing together the Buddhist and political domain, the former Prime Minister of Bhutan Jigme Y. Thinley spoke on the topic of "Ecological Resilience in Gross National Happiness: Evidence from the Environmental Management of a Buddhist state" via zoom. His talk gave a concrete example of how countries can be managed with the view of interdependence and its implications in mind. He also offered a great practical take-away in his concluding advice on what each of us can do to live within planetary boundaries.

Another international guest whom we welcomed via zoom was the environmental activist, author and founder of the organisation Local Futures, Helena Norberg-Hodge. She gave us a big picture view of the dynamic economic forces at play in our current society and how to return to a more sustainable model through local economies. A point that struck me was how she highlighted that localization is a way to build communities in which we can share about our struggles

and how this process brings healing and support.

Furthermore, the French biographer of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, author and spiritual activist, Sofia Stril-Rever called on the qualities of love, compassion and universal responsibility as implications of the view of interdependence and guided a practice on cultivating loving kindness.

Combining these qualities with a scientific approach, Pascale Fabre, a Physio-chemist, Buddhist practitioner and research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), focused on plastic pollution in oceans as an example of interdependence. On the basis of the most recent scientific findings related to the extent of this pollution, she guided the audience in a reflection on how we personally relate to this issue. She ended with specific actions society and we ourselves can adopt to minimise plastic pollution. Turning inwards, she argues, helps us take action more appropriately and enthusiastically.

The natural world is full of examples of interdependence and the ecologist Franck Richard, from the Centre for Functional and Evolutionary Ecology (CEFE) department at the CNRS, guided the audience in an exploration of the interdependence between living organisms present in the under-ground.

Finally, moving towards the end of the forum, the importance of local actions was emphasised. Dekila Chungyalpa, director of





the Loka Initiative at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the environmental advisor to His Holiness the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Thinley Norbu, joined us via Zoom to share with us the lessons she learned from her experience in helping to establish the environmental protection association Khoryug. This group of over 50 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries in the Himalayas started in 2008 and has done remarkable work in facilitating environmental education and action. Her practical summary of conditions of success and failure for setting up environmental actions at these monasteries is of great use for other Buddhist or religious groups striving to implement an environmental program. Beyond this specific Tibetan Buddhist example, Dekila reminded us of the even wider perspective that faith groups in general can play an important role in environmental protection because they practically represent a large share of land-owners, financial investors, educators and leaders, and

spiritually often motivate people to protect nature, especially among indigenous peoples all around the world who share a special link with their lands.

I see this forum as a first and small step towards living up to the potential a Buddhist centre can have in protecting the environment. Part of this initial role was also to support and showcase the great work of the many active environmental associations of the area around Lerab Ling. Eight associations ranging from the local permaculture association Humus Pays D'Oc to compost educators to the representatives of the French National Forestry Office (ONF) animated stands at the fair of local initiatives that took place during lunchtime.

A favourite element of many participants were the workshops in the afternoon. They invited participants to learn specific tools to help them in their environmental actions, such as learning how to meditate, how to start a permaculture vegetable garden,

getting to know the lives within forests and how to manage forests sustainably. The choice of workshops over the course of the three days were: "Healing oneself to heal the world" with Frère Phap Lu (a former doctor and monk from Plum Village), "Discovering Meditation" with Rigpa meditation instructors, "A guided tour of Lerab Ling's environment and environmental management" with Sam Truscott (member of Lerab Ling's environmental committee), "What to know about forests" with Élisabeth Guichard (a Buddhist forester of the French National Forestry Office), "Starting a Permaculture vegetable garden - an exchange" with Nelly Pons (author committed to ecology), "Contemplating Interdependence" with Dominique Side (Rigpa senior teacher), "Sustainable forest management applied to Lerab Ling" with Gaëtan du Bus de Warnaffe (independent forest manager consulting Lerab Ling), "How permaculture can feed our world and ourselves" with Damien Dekarz (permaculture educator), "A Collective experiment - Where to land?" with Chloé Latour (Lawyer, theatre director and artistic facilitator) and "An educative walk from Lerab Ling to the L'Escandorgue forest" with Laurent Bayle-Bascoul (forester of the neighbouring section of the French National Forestry Office).

A number of these workshop holders also participated in the round-table discussions on interdependence that took place each afternoon in a plenary setting. These exchanges

of different environmental actors, Buddhist teachers and practitioners brought forth intriguing conversations that undoubtedly will shape the future editions of these forums.

These are just a few snap-shots of the main program highlights to give you an impression of the perspectives and topics this forum discussed and to invite you to dive into the recordings of the main talks on Prajna Online if they caught your interest. Three talks are also available in English only on Lerab Ling's Youtube channel. We hope they provide inspiration and support for anyone to become a force of wisdom working for the earth themselves.

What we learned

A total of around 350 people participated in either one, two or three days of this forum and each of them had their own unique impressions and insights they took home with them. This short article just presents my view of this event



coming from the perspective of an organiser and program designer who could not even join a single workshop herself because she was too busy with organising the rest of the day. Nevertheless, from the atmosphere I felt and the feedback and conversations our team heard, it seems that this forum achieved its main goal of bringing a sense of hope and inspiration, providing practical tools each of us can apply and creating a feeling of interconnectedness and shared

mission between Buddhist and environmental fields. This fills us with great joy!

Of course, there are many points to improve in future and this is something similar events could learn from. The program was quite full with a lot of input and people wished for more time to reflect for themselves and to exchange with each other. A specific challenge of our forum was that the main language of the event was French (international speakers got translated), while we also wanted to cater for an English audience who joined via live-stream. Here the balance of which audience and translation style to prioritise was not always satisfactory for everyone. In addition, people wished that the talks via zoom had been more interactive, which is doable in future and ideally could be remedied by speakers being present in person. Furthermore, we received the feedback that people would have liked more speakers active in the political arena. Also we experienced first hand



how hard it is to change certain environmentally unfriendly habits that have become systemic over the course of many years. In future, we will devote even more time and care to ensure that every element in the venue from bottles to badges lives up to the message of the forum and has less of a negative environmental impact. With these lessons learned, we are planning the next forum and hope to inspire other similar events.

The tree will continue to grow - Future Forums

After the time of harvest, nature rests and regenerates to gather the strength to give fruits again. Learning from this example of

nature, after the season of intense fruition and harvest during the first forum, we needed a time to rest and regenerate. Therefore, we delayed the next forum to 2024 and we are slowly letting our roots gather nutrients for growing another beautiful event for you to enjoy and benefit from. You are all warmly invited to join in this feast in 2024! To stay in touch, you can follow our instagram account @sagessepourlaterre.

In the meantime, it is so encouraging to see so many initiatives and programs dedicated to bringing together Buddhist wisdom and environmental protection – this issue of the EBU magazine being at once one of

them and a testimony to these efforts. We offer our gratitude and best wishes to all these endeavours and hope that these initiatives will inspire the wider Buddhist world and other communities to affirm their role in protecting and regenerating the planet!

May each of us connect to the force of transformation within ourselves and thereby influence society to help to restore to our world the living notions of interrelatedness, respect, hope and meaning that it so desperately lacks. 🧘

All these images have been provided by Carla Ott.





The Way of the Ecosattva



By Jake Lyne

“The world remains on an unsustainable path.”

Spencer Dale, Chief Economist,

British Petroleum, June 2022

Two Buddhist teachers have been major influences in my life, the late Chan Masters Sheng Yen and John Crook. John Crook was a naturalist, deeply concerned and at times very angry about the harm we have been doing to the natural world.

Master Sheng Yen taught that four ‘environments’ should be protected: the spiritual environment by keeping our minds stable and pure; the natural environment by maintaining the co-existence and co-prosperity of the whole earth community (all sentient beings); the living environment by taking only what we need and minimising waste and pollutants; and the social environment by being dignified and humble in society.

He also taught that when confronted with any situation or problem we should adopt the attitude of wisdom by 1) facing the problem, 2) accepting it, 3) dealing with it and 4) letting it go. I will use this fourfold framework to

consider the path of the Ecosattva. An Ecosattva is a Bodhisattva, but with a particular focus on sustainability and ecology.

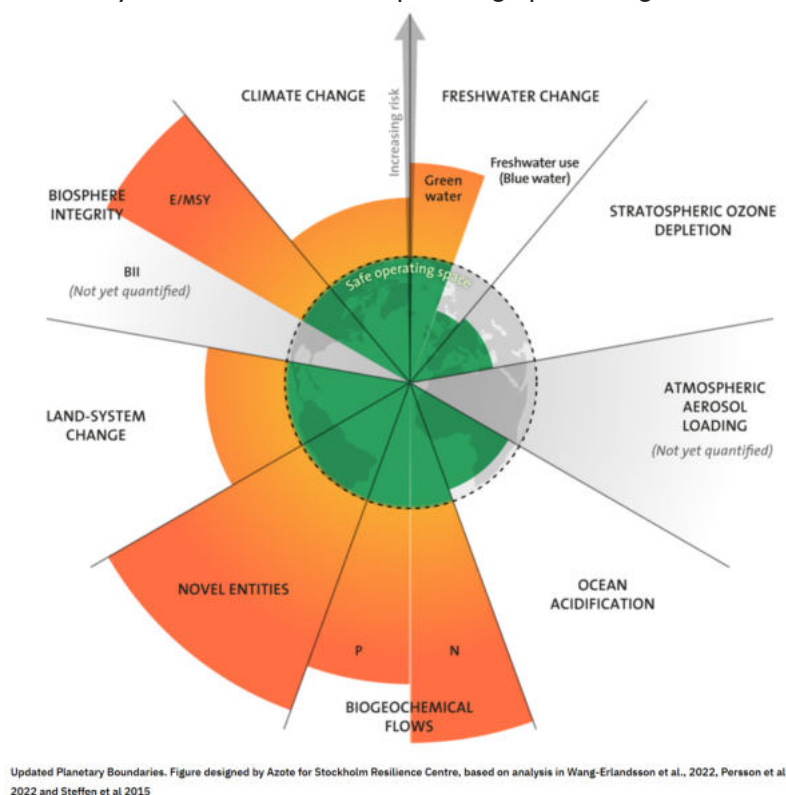
Step 1: Facing It

The period of the last 11,000 years is known as the Holocene epoch, a time of unusually stable and benign climate, during which human civilisations evolved. Since 1950 we have entered the epoch of the Anthropocene, in which humanity now drives ecological change at planetary scale; a period during which human-caused ecological crises have been developing. The ecological crises we face today will get worse; potentially a lot worse. How much worse depends on all of humanity, all of us.

Scientists have identified a ‘safe operating space’ defined by 9 planetary boundaries (Fig.1). Climate change and loss of biodiversity are the core

boundaries, most critical for our survival. Biodiversity and climate change are mutually interdependent. If the natural environment is in good health, then forests, the oceans, wetlands, grasslands and soils become carbon sinks and so help keep the atmosphere free of excess greenhouse gases. But high levels of greenhouse gases exceed the capacity of the biosphere to absorb excess carbon and this problem is exacerbated by human destruction of rain forests, degradation of soil quality etc. The other seven boundaries if crossed, increase pressure on these two. To date six boundaries have been exceeded and the boundary for a seventh, ocean acidification, that is a consequence of ocean sequestration of excess levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide, is likely to be breached by 2050 if current trends continue.

Fig.1: Planetary Boundaries: Safe operating space in green



Note to eds. source for Fig.1 <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

“Transgressing a boundary increases the risk that human activities could inadvertently drive the earth system into a much less hospitable state, damaging efforts to reduce poverty and leading to a deterioration of human well-being in many parts of the world, including wealthy countries.”¹

The six boundaries that have been breached are climate change (CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere too high), biosphere integrity (extinction rates threatening a sixth mass extinction), land system change (e.g. rainforest cleared for agricultural use), novel entities (e.g. chemical and

plastic pollution), phosphorous and nitrogen cycle disruption (resulting in poor air quality and algal blooms that threaten human health and sea life) and freshwater change (e.g. drought and flooding affecting food crops and plant life).

Climate change has attracted the most attention. The world is warming rapidly, glaciers are disappearing, storms, floods, forest fires and droughts are increasingly severe, and scientists warn that we are approaching, or may already have passed significant tipping points, after which some changes could accelerate or be irreversible.

Our civilisation has flowered in the last 200 years, due to the

discovery that the earth’s crust is a giant battery that stores vast quantities of ancient solar power in the form of oil, gas and coal. Human ingenuity has resulted in technologies that allow the energy from this battery to be tapped at all scales, from large organisations and machines, down to individual households and motorists.

In 2021, the International Energy Authority set out a pathway to ‘net zero’ by 2050, that is an example of policies that must be followed if global temperature rise since pre-industrial times is to be limited to 1.5°C. In this pathway no new oil, gas or coal fields should be opened post-2021. There needs to be massive acceleration of renewable energy, associated with rapid improvements in energy efficiency so that overall energy demand does not rise and net CO₂ emissions reduce to zero. Countries need to back up targets with clear policies and plans and need to act on these plans.

However, there is a huge gap between this net zero pathway and what is happening. At present there are 2,800 coal mines operating in the world and proposals for 470 new mines or extensions. There are almost 5,000 oil and gas extraction sites in the world, a further 79 in development and 108 new discoveries. Here is a 2018 quote regarding one of these discoveries:

Mark Thomas, BP North Sea Regional President said: “These are

¹ Will Steffen, Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2015. <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2015-01-15-planetary-boundaries---an-update.html>

exciting times for BP in the North Sea as we lay the foundations of a refreshed and revitalised business that we expect to double production to 200,000 barrels a day by 2020 and keep producing beyond 2050."

Countries that have set net zero goals have not identified policies that would be sufficient to meet net zero, and progress on implementing policies that are in place were declared as 'woefully inadequate' by the United Nations. Even if all policies in place were implanted the world would have warmed by between 2.4 and 2.6°C by 2100.

The Energy 'Hockey Stick' * Graph

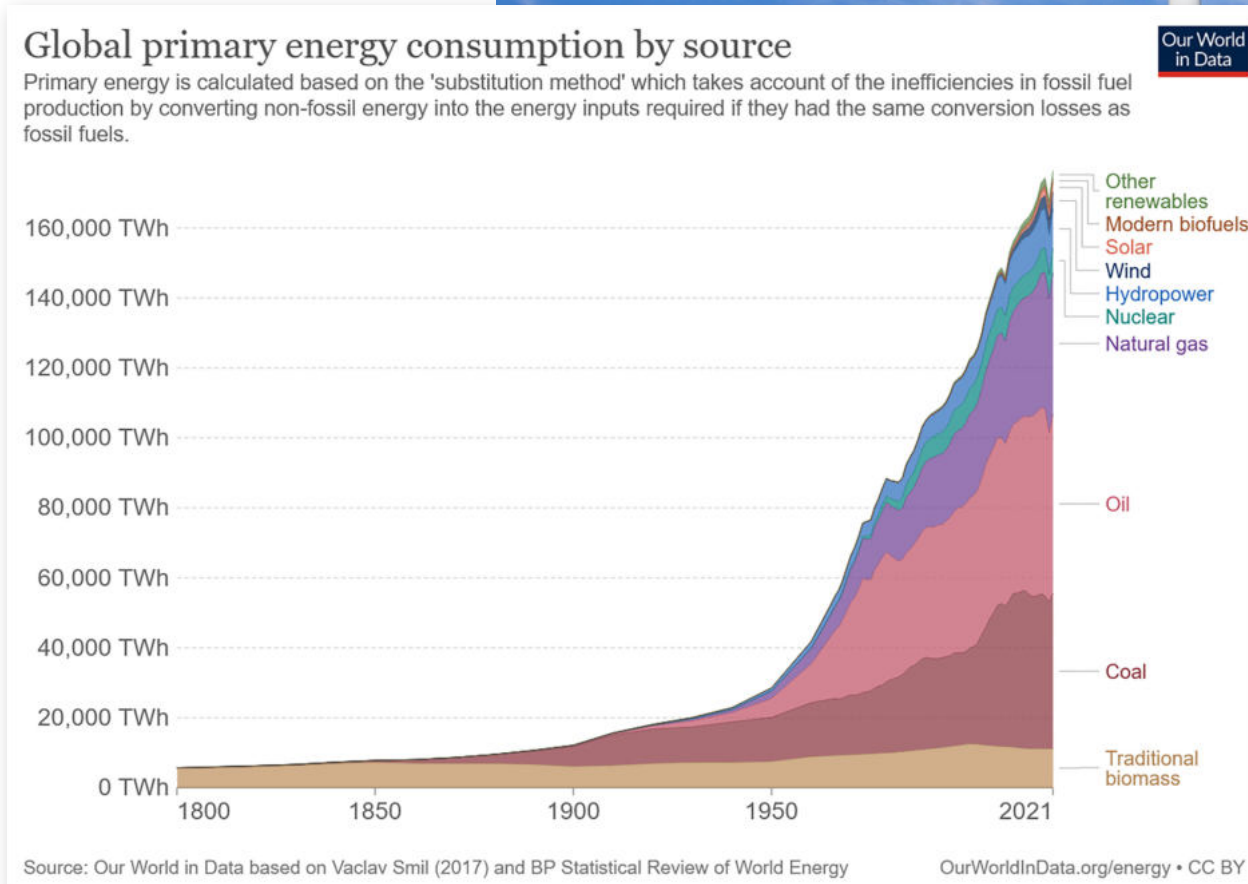


Fig.2: Rising demand for energy

*Hockey stick refers to the shape of the graph
note to Eds. Source <https://ourworldindata.org/global-energy-200-years>



Until now, world energy consumption has been rising rapidly since the 1950s (Fig.2) and is continuing to rise. In 2021 world energy demand increased by 5.8%, off-setting the reduction in energy use during the pandemic. On current trends, by 2050 world primary energy consumption may be 45% greater than current levels, due largely to developments in China, India and other Asian countries as they catch up with living standards enjoyed in Europe and North America. Even with the development of renewable energy,

on current trends, 50% of energy would still come from fossil fuels.

Exponential Greenhouse Gas Levels

Burning fossil fuels pollutes the atmosphere. Roughly 36 billion tons of CO₂ were released into the atmosphere in 2021. The annual increase of CO₂ in the atmosphere has been accelerating and is now double the rate that it was in 1960. The level of CO₂ in the atmosphere is comparable to the level in the Pliocene epoch 4 million years ago, when the

average global temperature was 3.9°C warmer than in pre-industrial times and sea levels were 23m higher.

Methane (CH₄) levels are also rising sharply and this rate is also accelerating, and especially markedly in 2020 and 2021. Methane is at least 25 times more potent than CO₂ as a greenhouse gas, and at present contributes to between 16 and 20% of global warming. It stays in the atmosphere for 12 years, but the replacement rate is greater than the rate of decay (Fig. 3).

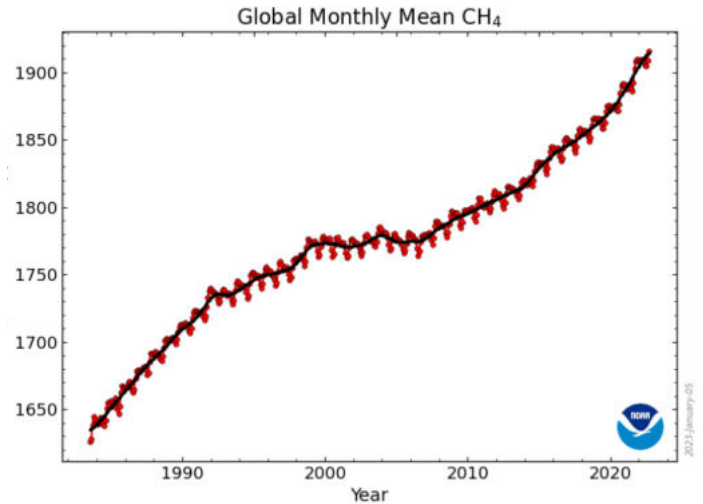
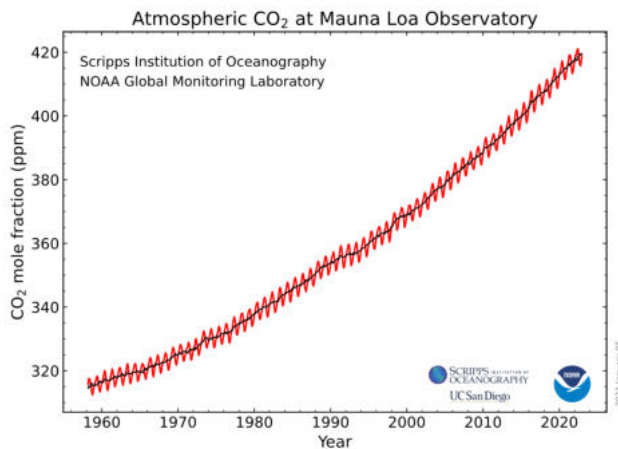


Fig.3: Levels of Greenhouse Gases in the atmosphere by year

Note to Eds. Fig 3 sources: <https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/data/co2.html> and <https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/data/ch4.html>



Negotiated Failure

It is remarkable that in agreements from the first 25 COP (Climate Change Conference of the Parties) meetings, fossil fuels were not mentioned at all, due to the lobbying influence of fossil fuel companies and their political supporters. These talks have not even resulted in a reduced **rate of increase** in greenhouse gasses, let alone led to any reductions. For the first time, in COP26 there was an agreement to phase down unabated coal (i.e., in coal plants without carbon capture, utilisation and storage, CCUS), but with no timetable. At present there are 7,500 coal fired power stations in operation or in construction worldwide and only five are 'abated'. The cost of CCUS is a disincentive to retrofitting power stations, so whilst coal is likely to be phased down eventually on cost grounds, without a clear timetable this will be too slow to meet climate goals.

Oil companies have been lobbying for years to persuade governments that natural gas should be treated as a 'transition fuel' and this phrase was included in the COP27 agreement, but targets for phasing down gas were resisted. This is no surprise, because 100,000km of new pipelines are on schedule to be completed by 2030 and there are plans for an additional 100,000km thereafter. This is despite a statement by the International Energy Authority that emissions from unabated gas fire plants need to reduce by 4% annually to 2030 to meet net zero commitments.

Natural gas extraction is also associated with significant release of methane into the atmosphere, through gas flaring, deliberate release from damaged pipelines prior to repairs and leakage across the whole gas network.

Specific plans to reduce oil extraction have never been agreed at any COP meeting.

Whilst the Climate Change COP meetings are in the public eye, the work of the World Energy Council (WEC) attracts much less attention, yet this organisation has far more power and influence on energy policy than COP meetings. There are 3,000 member institutions of the WEC and 90 country members; it is the principal network for energy suppliers and energy politicians in the world.

The Council frames its work on a 'trilemma', the balancing of energy security, energy equity and environmental sustainability. We only need to think of the Russian attacks on energy infrastructure in Ukraine to recognise the importance of energy security. Energy equity is indexed by access to electricity and to clean cooking in developing countries, and by energy consumption per person, with the highest rates of consumption, by some margin, for Canada and USA. The emphasis on sustainability is crucial as part of the World Energy Council's vision for 'the great transition' to clean energy sources.

However, the trilemma model is flawed. First, it treats the three issues of the trilemma as of interchangeable importance

depending on circumstances, rather than treating sustainability as the non-negotiable issue (since we cannot negotiate away the physics of climate change) within which energy security and energy equity must be managed. Failing to make sustainability the central priority means that vested interests in "business as usual" can be disguised. Fossil fuel companies can downplay sustainability, claiming that security and equity are a higher priority in the near term, and thereby advance their business interests. The war in Ukraine has made it easier for oil companies to justify massive investments in gas extraction, by emphasising energy security, whilst being lacklustre about investments in renewable energy. Here is an email exchange that occurred in the lead up to COP27 in Egypt, which illustrates a lack of enthusiasm for renewables by an oil and gas company:

*An internal email sent by the British Ambassador in Egypt reports that **BP had admitted in a meeting that it had 'its hands full with gas' and had been 'low key' about green energy projects in Egypt**, with the Ambassador remarking to a colleague that BP Egypt 'certainly won't be the vehicle' for energy transition initiatives in the region.¹*

1. <https://cultureunstained.org/2022/11/11/bp-has-hands-full-with-gas-in-egypt-and-wont-be-vehicle-for-transition-concludes-uk-ambassador-in-email/>

The equity argument has been used to justify exploitation of gas reserves in Africa, the argument being that African countries can use the wealth generated from selling gas to further their development. However, not only is exploiting gas environmentally unsustainable, there is a risk that Africa will be left with more debt than benefit as the price of renewables eventually undercuts the price of gas. The solution to equity is for wealthy countries to honour commitments made in COP meetings to provide financial support for developing countries during the transition away from fossil fuels.

Secondly, the emphasis within the equity dimension is one sided.

The WEC emphasis on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is laudable, as is an emphasis on improving energy efficiency, but no mention is made of the threat to sustainability due to the excessive energy demands of the world's richest countries.

The UK Parliament Environmental Audit Committee argued that there is no need to balance security and equity against sustainability:

*The energy trilemma can be solved by tackling all three issues together. There are many opportunities to achieve synergies between affordability, security and sustainability.*¹

1. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmenvaud/109/report.html>

Renewable Energy

A fast transition to renewable sources of energy would pay for itself, because the cost of energy would be lower than it is now.²

It would also limit some of the serious impacts of climate change, such as loss of agricultural productivity, effects of sea level rise and sea acidity, biodiversity loss, water shortages, human conflict and harm to the health and well-being of people in countries at most risk of climate damage. However, a slow transition is both harmful to the climate and expensive, partly because it is

2. Way, Ives, Mealy and Farmer (2022) Empirically grounded technology forecasts and the energy transition. *Joule* v6. pp 2057-82.

Jacobson et al (2022) Low-cost solutions to global warming, air pollution and energy insecurity for 145 Countries. *Energy and Environmental Science*, Issue 8.



expensive to run two systems (extraction of fossil fuels and reliance on renewables) in parallel for an extended period. Job losses in the fossil fuel industry will be a significant issue, but ultimately the energy transition will result in far more new jobs than jobs lost.³

Achieving a fast and fair transition depends upon many factors, including support from wealthy countries to developing countries, investment in training, policies to manage loss of employment in the fossil fuel sector, financial policies that curtail fossil fuel subsidies and transfer support to renewables, and strong political leadership. These are formidable challenges in our divided world and especially following the war in Ukraine and weaponisation of energy supply.

Other Hockey Stick Graphs

I have gone into some depth regarding climate change and its relationship to energy use. Any of the other planetary boundaries could have been chosen, because in most cases the graphs of change are a similar shape (the hockey stick shape) to the global primary energy consumption graph. Each has a long flat line which suddenly takes off and becomes exponential from 1950 onwards. This applies to plastic production and plastic waste (waste is expected to triple by 2060 without radical change to current practices), population growth, world GDP, extinction rates and many others.

3. Koberle et al (2021) *The Cost of Mitigation Revisited*. *Nature Climate Change* v. 11 pp 1035-45

What we have to face

The greatest ecological threats, defined by the nine planetary boundaries are nearly all going in the wrong direction and moving the world towards potentially catastrophic consequences. Even in relatively optimistic scenarios, glaciers will continue to melt away, Arctic sea ice cover will continue to shrink in the summer, sea levels will rise and extreme weather events with their associated storms, floods, droughts and forest fires will increase.

Some of these effects have the potential to stabilise if the amount of CO₂ released into the atmosphere is brought down rapidly in the near future, but this will only happen if the biosphere (trees, forests, wetlands etc.) has the capacity to reabsorb a significant proportion of the excess CO₂ that has accumulated in the atmosphere, which is why it is so concerning that the safe planetary threshold for the biosphere has been crossed. But even with natural CO₂ sequestration and achievement of net zero in 2050, reversal of ice and sea level changes will take centuries⁴

However, we should not fall for speculative doom scenarios as if they are fact. Valid scientific consensus is the best guide to what is needed, what is possible and what may or may not happen. It is far more motivating to create a vision of a possible future where the earth returns to a healthy, stable condition in which life can thrive.

4. *State of the Cryosphere Report (2022)*
<https://iccninet.org/statecryo2022/>





Picture: chris-ensey-unsplash

Step 2: Accepting It

Having faced a problem, accepting it means taking responsibility and being determined to take the problem seriously. Fossil fuel lobbyists have attempted to shift all of the responsibility onto the public as a way of hiding their focus on maximising profit from continued oil, gas and coal extraction. So, whilst we should not fall for this, it remains the case that we can all take some responsibility for the unfolding crises.

Acceptance it is not easy and is not a once and for all matter. The world crisis is deeply disturbing and demanding. Feelings of sadness, fear, helplessness, hopelessness and rage come and go as we face up to what is happening. However, practicing Buddhists have many different forms of meditation that help with acceptance. Practices that induce awareness of impermanence reduce suffering and increase clarity; metta practices induce universal compassion, touch the heart and reduce 'compassion

fatigue'; practices that develop bodhicitta (the wish to help all beings be happy) prepare us for finding our authentic response to the crises that we face. Acceptance also requires wisdom. It is wise to become knowledgeable about the issues, trying to listen to all sides of an argument. It is wise to recognise that the problems are on a very large scale and individual contributions are mostly very small, but nevertheless essential in adding to the collective efforts of the millions of other people concerned about the same issues. It is also wise to make contributions that are appropriate to our personal talents, skills and resources and to rejoice in and support the contributions of others.

Step 3: Dealing with it

Master Sheng Yen emphasised acting with energy and self-confidence, based on careful planning and execution. The range of contributions people are making across the world is dizzying. There are so many individuals and groups working on so many

different issues, ideas and forms of activism to try to shift towards a sustainable future for life on earth. There is no problem with finding something more that we can each do, the possibilities are limitless. Responding skilfully is to have a no-self attitude, which means not putting one's 'self' in the centre of the things. It is to work with attention, clearly focussed in the present moment, with the mind on the job, rejecting hidden agendas, judgementalism, self-criticism and self-aggrandisement. It involves taking care of oneself and others and neither over-estimating nor under-estimating one's capabilities. When a task is completed, it is good to acknowledge what has been accomplished.

Step 4: Letting it go

Ecological crises will not go away in our lifetimes. But there is no need to make care and concern into an overwhelming burden. Letting it go means accepting that we have no control on longer term outcomes. We will see more set-backs, losses and disasters as the climate and other crises unfold. We will also see new ideas, developments, successes and changes.

Letting it go means letting go of what we have accomplished when it has been completed, creating space for the next contribution that we might make and taking a rest when we need to.

Given the normal human life-span, we will only ever know about the early years of the Anthropocene, we cannot read to the end of the book and any ideas we have

about the very long term are merely speculation. This is not to deny the disturbing trends, nor the gravity of what is very likely to occur over the next decades. What we do know is that the earth does not need us, but we need the earth. 'Letting it go' means devoting ourselves to fully respecting that situation and proceeding with all the love, energy, determination and compassion we can muster, so that our lives and the lives of all beings on this earth are helped as much as is humanly possible. The

ecosattva vows are a guide for doing this.

The Ecosattva Vows

The ecosattva vows are based on vows that Joanna Macy developed in a workshop on The Work that Reconnects and subsequently published in her book Active Hope. A sixth vow (third on the list below) was added in a collaboration between Joanna Macy and the One-Earth Sangha⁵.

5. <https://oneearthsangha.org/articles/guideposts-on-the-ecosattva-path/>

A vow is a commitment, or undertaking and like the Bodhisattva vows, Ecosattva vows are limitless in time and extent. There is always more we can accomplish and learn as our appreciation and experience of them deepens. Vows do not depend on optimism or pessimism; they liberate us from binary thinking. They can become a continuous practice, with some vows becoming more salient depending on the situations we find ourselves in. ►

Based on my love of the world and understanding of deep interdependence of all things,

I vow

To live in Earth more lightly and less violently in the food, products and energy I consume.

To commit myself daily to the healing of the world and the welfare of all beings; to discern and replace human systems of oppression and harm.

To invite personal discomfort as an opportunity to share in the challenge of our collective liberation.

To draw inspiration, strength and guidance from the living Earth, ancestors and the future generations, as well as siblings of all species.

To help others in their work for the world and to ask for help when I feel the need.

To pursue a daily spiritual practice that clarifies my mind, strengthens my heart and supports me in observing these vows.

► Vows are also a personal matter, and maybe these words do not capture your vow: what is your vow? In a conversation, John Crook the naturalist once said "life is a fight", a perspective for which there is quite a lot of evidence in the natural world. The stance of the ecosattva is also the stance of a warrior. In facing and responding to the human created problems of the Anthropocene, finding a fighting spirit is indeed an act of love for the world. A fight is not the only perspective, the deeper reality is interdependence and cooperation and this fight can only be won through deepening our understanding of the art of cooperation.

Jake Lyne

21st January 2023 🧘

Is Ecodharma (always) Buddhist?



By Michael Vermeulen

Worldwide Buddhists are at the frontline of initiatives to halt the disastrous ecological crisis of our time. Some call themselves eco-sattvas, others talk about eco-dharma or even about a new main Buddhist tradition: terra-yana. But the ecological movement is a large house with many different rooms, and some are less compatible with Buddhism than others.

Ecodharma is right insofar as it emphasises the need for ecological awareness in everything we do, including in our spiritual and ethical practice. This is actually not new or alien to Buddhism. But in the enthusiasm to take action it sometimes appears that anything with an eco-label gets embraced, especially if there is a reference to traditional cultures or Mother Earth. When some describe (eco)dharma as 'a powerful companion for us on our journey from egocentricity to ecocentricity' (Dharma Gaia, 1990, pXIV), the concept of centricity risks to turn the dharma into its opposite: an ideology.

Ecological awareness

Ecological awareness has been at the heart of Buddhism from the very start. Trees for example were always considered sacred. The Buddha was born and died in open air between trees, he had his first meditation experience as a child under a tree and - central to all Buddhist traditions - he reached Awakening under a Bodhi Tree (*Ficus Religiosa*) evoking the Earth as his witness. Trees provide shade and protection to humans and other animals, so the Buddha told his sangha of lay and celibate women and men to approach them as friends. Mendicant monks and nuns were not allowed to cut a tree or even cut a branch.

Although this respect for trees could also be explained by religious rather than ecological motives, other rules showed a remarkable awareness of the impact of urbanisation and human behaviour on nature. The sangha was for example urged to be conscious of water contamination and how it could affect the many life forms living in the waters. The

mendicant nuns and monks were advised not to throw their waste or food leftovers in rivers and lakes.

This ecological awareness was no coincidence but an integral part of Buddhist ethics as reflected in the Metta Sutta: 'May all beings be happy; may they live in safety and joy.' So when emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism in 264 BCE, this implied more than personal spiritual training. Ruling as a Buddhist also entailed social and ecological actions: he ordered the building of hospitals for humans and animals (which in the West only appeared in the late 18th century CE), planted new trees, created public parks and made laws to protect wells.

Theo- and anthropocentrism

This 2500 year old history in India of caring for the environment may come as a surprise to Westerners, for European cultures were dominated by the Judeo-Christian religion for almost 2000 years. The central dogma of its theocentric worldview is that the universe was

created by a super-natural, male, omnipotent, omniscient and all-good being. He placed men at the centre of a world with a sharp distinction between nature and humanity. Nature was created to meet all men's needs and desires; it had no purpose on its own. Cardinal Newman wrote: *'We have no duties towards the brute creation; there is no relation of justice between them and us. (...) We may use them, we may destroy them at our pleasure, not our wanton pleasure, but still for our own ends, for our own benefit and satisfaction, provided we can give a rational account of what we do.'* (Passmore, *The Treatment of Animals*, 1975, p203)

Modern nations in post-Medieval Europe would replace theology by economy as the highest good within their societies. A more secular anthropocentric worldview would emerge next to the theocentric one, but it was still based on the same premises: humanity was totally different from nature, and nature an unlimited pool of resources for eternal growth. One of its most extreme versions is the Neoliberal Ideology. In here, the central dogma is that every individual has the unconditional and unlimited right to make as much profit as possible. Social and ecological impacts are at best secondary considerations but mostly presumed irrelevant. The Neoliberal Ideology was - and is - the main accelerator of our disastrous violent relation with nature and Earth during the last decades.

Eco-centrism

In the - urgently needed - efforts to liberate our societies from the Neoliberal Ideology, many ecological movements cherish a rather romantic view on the environment: humanity will flourish if we restore a presumed lost harmony with nature and Mother Earth. Such ecocentric worldviews lift the mental schism between humanity and nature but replace it by a new duality between 'natural' and 'unnatural.' The natural world is now looked at as a source for ethical inspiration for what humans should or should not do. This leads to numerous contradictions and paradoxes, for the beauty of ecosystems has a dark side: they are impossible without tremendous suffering. It is natural for example that the lion eats the lamb; predators need to kill, both for their own survival and to maintain the ecosystem.

Furthermore there are many things in nature that we do not find exemplary: procreation is natural but so is incest and infanticide; cooperation is natural but so is survival of the fittest and cannibalism.

In the end '(un)natural' provides no clear ethical criterion but is used to objectify personal preferences. Even in Antiquity the cherry picking of this worldview was exposed: "It is ridiculous to cite the behaviour of irrational animals in one place as an example and to reject it as irrelevant in another place." (Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis*, 22)

An a-centric worldview

We humans have a strong mental tendency to think in binary categories. Unfortunately, what is initially seen as something we don't like is very quickly turned into an evil that needs to be fought and eradicated. Our binary bias leads to a moral judgement between good/superior/healthy versus bad/inferior/ill. It makes no difference if the duality is based on distinguishing Self from Other, Us from Them, Saint from Sinner, or Natural from Unnatural.

When Gotama left his home to start his spiritual quest, he not only left behind a life of comfort and luxury, but also an eco-centric worldview. He had realised that no life form can escape the fates of illness, ageing and death. These are the true laws of nature, and no offerings to secure harmony with the cosmos could ever take such existential suffering away. Ultimately he would realise that the road to a flourishing life did not lie in harmony with nature, nor in rejecting nature and adopting a 'soul' (atman) as a new centre, nor in fantasies about a super-natural eternal order. The Buddha rejected such binary worldviews because they were no answer to dukkha/suffering. His worldview was what Stephen Batchelor calls a-centric: "For ultimately nothing in the universe deserves pride of place. No matter how noble something may be, as soon as it is placed at the center of things it becomes susceptible to deification, reification, and all the subsequent distortions and abuses that have



characterised things at the center of human history.” (Dharma Gaia, p180)

This a-centric dharma is described by Ken Jones as the ‘ultimate solvent’ of ideologies:

“The world in general, observed the Buddha, grasps after systems and is imprisoned in ideologies (...) Ideology supports the believer with a reassuringly simple picture of where he or she stands. It centers absolutely upon a key issue that becomes the distorting organizing principle for all other phenomena, except for those that are ignored because they cannot be made to fit.” (Dharma Gaia, pp186&187).

Interdependence

But how did the Buddha manage to avoid moral dualism and create such an ‘ideological solvent’ rather than a new ideology? He did so by focussing on interdependence instead of a sacred centre we need to bow, fight and die for. Interdependence places at the same time nothing and

everything at the centre. As Zen masters remind us, even the most humble daily situation is worth our attention and compassion and can lead to Awakening. Insight in interdependence, combined with empathy, makes us realise that all beings desire to flourish. It puts us on the road to a non-violent relation with all life forms and ecosystems; to ‘suffuse the whole world with unobstructed unconditional friendliness’ (metta sutta). Our spiritual path is then to learn to distinguish what is ‘skillful’ and ‘unskillful’ to deal with daily dukkha, rather than judging the world based on ontological good and evil.

The Buddhist Middle Path is not only a balance between personal hedonism and asceticism, it is also a worldview in between cosmic harmony with and a sharp separation from nature. It is no coincidence that the Buddha is often compared to a doctor and the dharma to medicine. Despite the awareness that illnesses are part of the natural harmony of life,

doctors look to actively intervene with this natural course of events without causing new harm. Just like a doctor does not accept an illness but looks for ways to cure it, so does the dharma look for ways to deal with suffering and guide us to a flourishing life.

A modern example of this a-centric perspective is the way we approach new technologies such as genetic engineering. In an eco-centric worldview this is an unnatural human interference in the natural way of things. It should therefore be rejected and avoided in all circumstances. The other extreme is the ego-centric Neoliberal view that whatever is possible should be allowed to happen if it offers a good opportunity for business. Buddhist ethics advocates a middle way between these extremes: everything that can avoid or diminish suffering is worth our consideration. What is important is how we use it and in what context. We can use a knife as a tool to eat or a weapon to kill. It is a fact

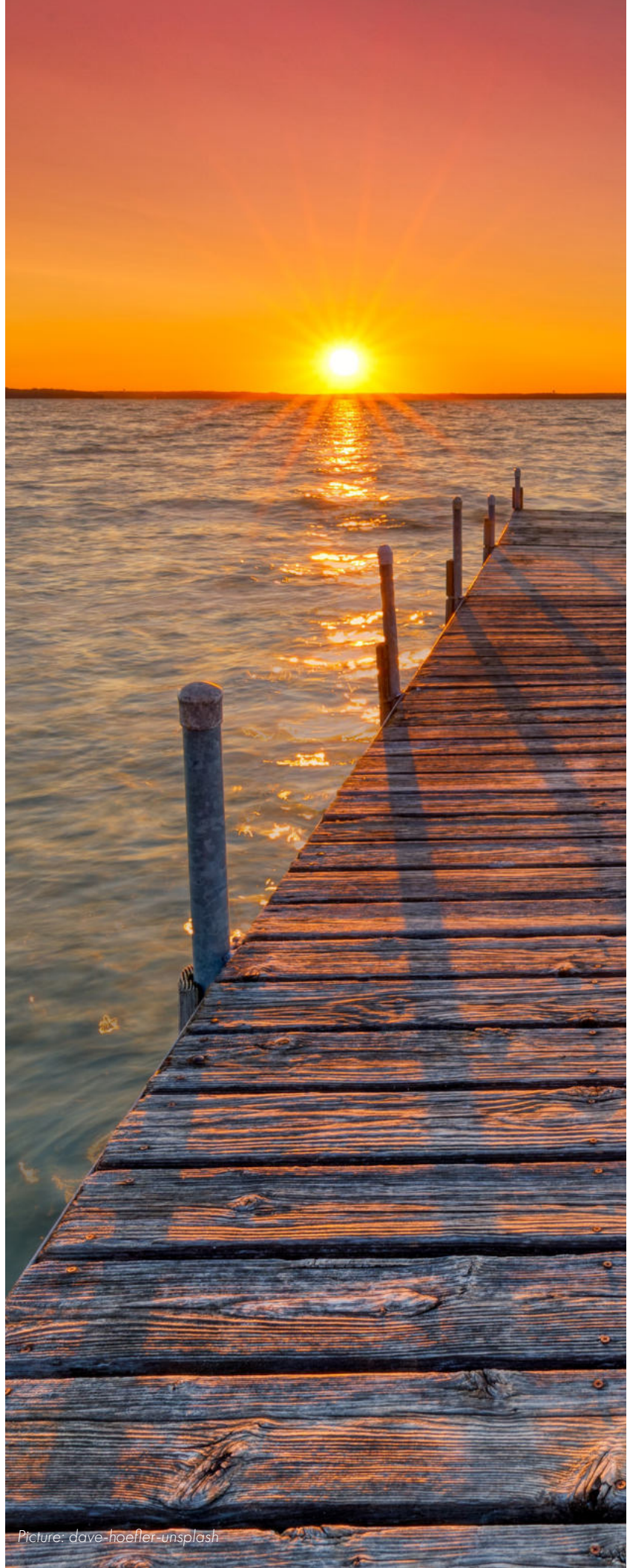


that genetic engineering can be an instrument to eradicate illnesses and avoid famine on a scale that is never seen before in history. It is equally true - and unfortunately already proven in the facts - that if we leave this technology to minds that are subject to the three poisons/fires of greed, aggression and prejudice, it can cause severe ecological and social harm and suffering.

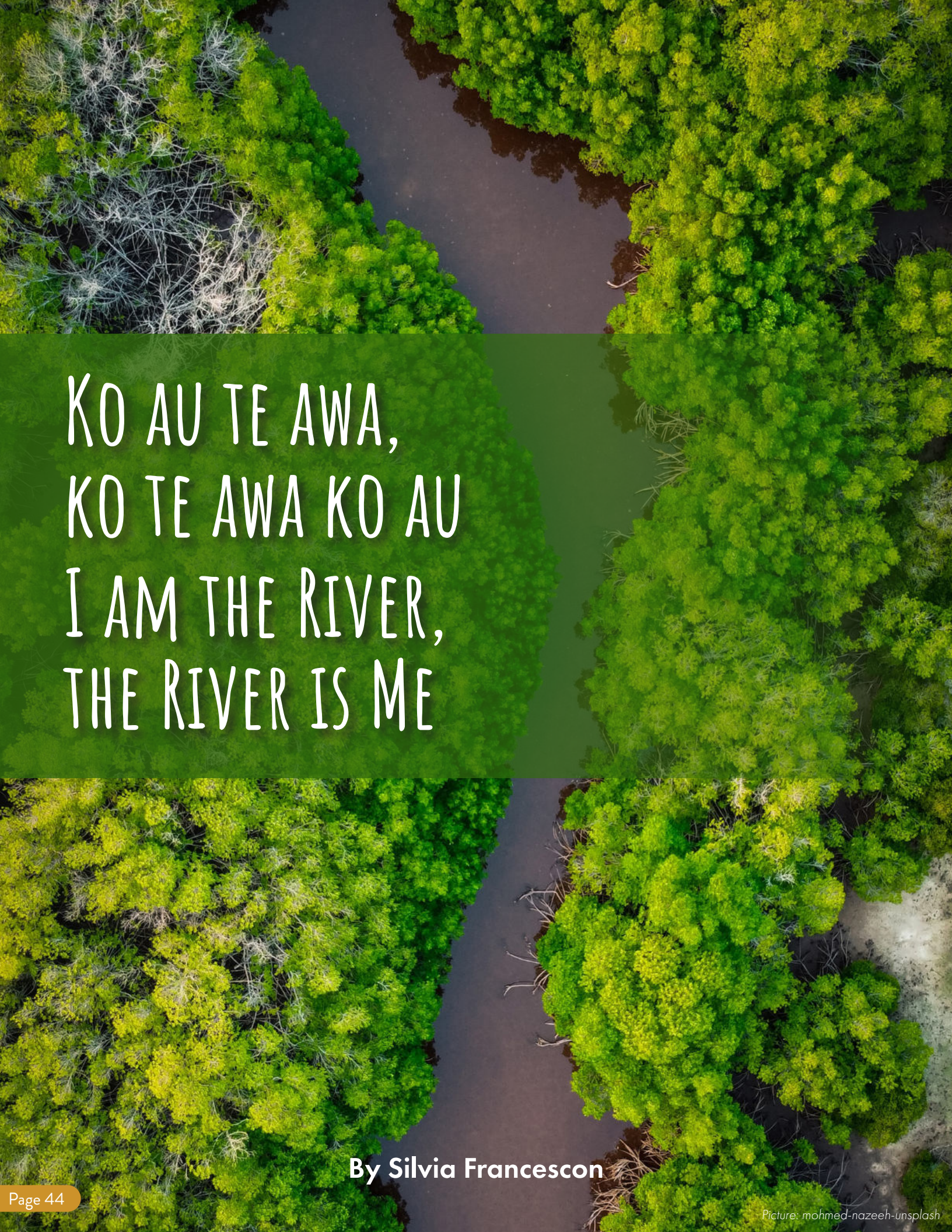
This example does not imply that Buddhists must embrace all possibilities of genetic engineering or even accept it at all. But it shows how Buddhist ethics does never a priori reject prospects to reduce suffering on dogmatic, doctrinal grounds.

Earth is our witness, not our Goddess

At the decisive moment in the process of Awakening Gotama touched the Earth. In doing so, he chose fact over fantasy; evidence & experience over tradition & authority. The Earth was evoked as a witness so Gotama could refer to reality as it is - empty of our concepts and cravings - and become the Buddha. But Mother Earth did not become a Goddess at the centre of a Buddhist eco-ideology. On the contrary. Touching the Earth awakens us from our distorted binary dreamworlds and our compulsive craving to reify and deify the worlds-we-want. The Buddha-dharma is a solvent to such fantasies and a medicine for our addiction to them; its a-centricity keeps us focussed on the real, interdependent world and liberates our mind from its imprisonment in ideologies. 🧘



Picture: dave-hoefler-unsplash

An aerial photograph of a river winding through a lush, green forest. The river is dark and calm, reflecting the surrounding trees. The forest is dense with various shades of green, and some bare branches are visible on the left bank.

KO AU TE AWA,
KO TE AWA KO AU
I AM THE RIVER,
THE RIVER IS ME

By Silvia Francescon

Current laws and policies cannot stop the loss of biodiversity and the climate crisis because they are based on separation of humans from the rest of Nature. They have failed at preventing ecological disasters precisely because they are based on a system that views Nature as property and soils, lands, water as “resources” that can be commodified and exploited. This system is anthropocentric at its core, i.e. based on human exceptionalism—the belief that humans are separate from Nature and superior to it, and that Nature exists for the benefit of humans.

We need to rethink human relationships with Mother Nature. Environmental philosophers like Arne Næss, Gary Snyder, Joanna Macy, Stephanie Kaza, have turned to deep ecology and Buddhism as the conceptual ground for a new ecological ethics that sees humans as non-separate (interdependent) from nature and that attributes sacred value to non-humans. The rocks, trees, streams, mountains – all have Buddha nature, as Kūkai elaborated in Japan and, similarly, by Dōgen, who re-read the line from the

Nirvāṇa Sūtra “All sentient beings without exception have Buddha-nature” as “All is sentient being, all beings are Buddha-nature”. Also, in Buddhādāsa Bhikku’s spiritual biocentric view, the destruction of nature implies the destruction of the dhamma. Phra Prayud Payutto (Dhammapitaka) attributes environmental destruction to a Western worldview flawed by the belief that humankind is separated from nature and that human beings are masters of nature. Beloved teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, who coined the term “inter-being”, wrote: “although we human beings are animals, a part of nature, we single ourselves out from nature, thinking of other animals and living beings as “nature” and acting as if we are not part of it [...] we should deal with [Nature] the way we should deal with ourselves. We shouldn’t harm ourselves, and we should not harm Nature. In fact, to harm Nature is to harm ourselves”.

Many communities, and now an entire movement, are reimagining the relationship with Mother Earth by restoring or reassembling indigenous wisdom, traditions, and knowledge. As the Māori saying goes, “Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko

au” - “I am the river, and the river is me.” To pollute water is to pollute people.

To accomplish this deep transformation, from ownership to oneness with the natural world, from human-centred to Earth-centred, rights of Nature are essential, useful (although not exclusive and sufficient) tools. Their recognition helps implementing the conversion from the way the modern world perceives nature (anthropocentric human exceptionalism) into biocentric deep ecology, based on the notion of non-duality and equality of life.

The Seed of Siena Declaration adopted in 2022 by the Global Alliance on the Rights of Nature recites: “We are all nurtured by the same sunlight and moon and share the same breath of life from the forests, grasses, oceans, and sky. Everything, including we humans, is interdependent in this glorious, intricate, interconnected web of life”. Mother Earth is the source of life, nourishment and learning and we are all interdependent beings with a shared destiny.

The rights of Nature movement is rooted in 1972 Christopher Stone's article "Should Trees Have Standing? - Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects", in Thomas Berry's notion of "earth jurisprudence," according to which the laws of societies follow and conform to the laws of nature, and - philosophically - on Arne Næss' deep ecology for which the living environment should be respected and have inherent value and rights to live and flourish, independent of its instrumental benefits for human use.

Rights of Nature, which establish that Nature has the right to exist, flourish and regenerate, extend the recognition of legal personhood to rivers, mountains, and non-human animals. In their current form, rights of Nature still rely on a system of modern law, especially through the proliferation of jurisprudence rulings. The radical transformation that our world needs, however, requires to strengthen Indigenous Peoples perspectives, whose laws, including customary-non-rights-based pathways and traditional knowledge, are drawn from their inherent relationship with Mother Earth.

It is the indigenous movement in Ecuador that inspired the introduction of rights of Nature in the Ecuadorian 2008 Constitution through the Andean indigenous concept of *sumac kawsay* (living in harmony with Nature). The Preamble of the Constitution refers explicitly to Pacha Mama and human kinship with water, land, and the other species. The New Zealand government has worked with Māori tribes to recognize the rights of certain rivers (since 2017 the Whanganui River has legal personhood), mountains, and forests (in 2014, the Te Urewera from a government-owned national park has become a legal entity with all the rights of a legal person). In 2016, Colombia's Constitutional Court recognized the rights of the Atrato River, and, in India, a 2017 court decision declared the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers to be living entities with legal rights. In 2022 the Mar Menor lagoon has been granted rights by the Spanish parliament, that also committed to the restoration of the highly degraded area. This is the first European ecosystem to receive recognition of rights of Nature. Indigenous peoples are working to

restore their rights and customary laws, such as the Ponca Nation of Oklahoma adopting a new statute for the rights of the *Ní'skà*, and *Ní'ží'dè* Rivers and other water bodies within their territory. COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity has also included rights of Nature in its decisions for the first time ever in 2022. There are multiple cases and rulings around the world that recognize rights of Nature: their evolution can be found at <https://ecojurisprudence.org> which provides physical and political maps tracking rights of Nature in the world.

This is beyond law and the legal system. This is a world-wide movement that is revolutionizing the system we are based on. The intertwined ecological, social, and spiritual crises of today are based on the illusions of separation and superiority which deny interconnectedness and oneness. These can be solved only when this separation-based system will be replaced with one based on connection, entanglement, and mutuality—in other words, with the wisdom of interdependence. 🧘



MOTHER EARTH



BUDDHISTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN PRACTICE

By Johannes Cairns



Much has been written about Buddhism and the environment at the doctrinal level. Many have proposed that Buddhism is good for the environment as it teaches virtues such as harmlessness and renunciation of material desires, and positions humans among rather than above other sentient beings. However, it is well known in behavioral research that human thoughts and beliefs do not necessarily lead to corresponding practical action. The ability of humanity to respond to climate change is perhaps the most pressing issue of our time. How then do the over five hundred million Buddhists in the world relate to the environment in practice?

Unfortunately, Buddhists are not doing particularly well. They are underrepresented among religions in UN climate change meetings. There is no large-scale Buddhist anti climate change movement in Asia where the overwhelming majority of Buddhists reside. Traditional Buddhist culture relies heavily on lay people making material donations to monasteries to create spiritual merit. This includes building new structures

and involves a lot of material throughput which contributes to climate warning. Buddhist monastics and lay people fly across the globe, often between Asia and the West, for teaching events, retreats, and pilgrimage, which has a high carbon footprint.

Buddhists have responded to environmental issues, including climate change, just not at a sufficient scale. Buddhism has influenced deep ecology thinking, and many Buddhist-inspired ecophilosophies have been developed since the 1960s. Some Buddhist centers have also adopted environmental policies or integrated outdoors experiences as part of meditation retreats. Some Buddhists have even formed separate climate protest groups in North America, Europe, and Australia, occasionally within Extinction Rebellion. Many Buddhists in East Asia and the West are vegetarian or vegan which reduces the carbon footprint of humanity. Buddhist monastics tend to live materially modest lives and not have children, which have positive impacts on climate change.

Why are Buddhists not responding to the challenge of climate change strongly enough? Anthropogenic climate change did not exist in the Buddha's time, and even if it had, the science to understand it would not have existed. Therefore, the Buddha did not offer any direct teachings about how to respond to such a situation. Any ecophilosophy has had to be created in the current era by drawing on particular Buddhist teachings. Moreover, for an ecophilosophy to have any impact, enough Buddhists would need to be convinced by it.

Why then has it been difficult to convince Buddhists to adopt ecophilosophies requiring stronger action to mitigate climate change? One reason is that Buddhism has tended to adjust to the prevailing political and cultural milieu. Buddhists have tended to focus on spiritual cultivation rather than political activism. A public crisis awareness around climate change is a relatively new phenomenon, and largely limited to the younger generation in affluent Western countries. To put things simply, the public pressure to take action

would have to outweigh the Buddhist tendency for focusing within.

In some Asian Buddhist countries, many people are still focusing on survival and building decent lives for their families, and lack the education to understand the science of climate change and to follow news about current global events. Some of the countries also have oppressive regimes or ideologies of social order disincentivizing citizen movements. In such environments, Buddhists are more reliant on state-driven climate change mitigation policies to become involved themselves compared to the more individualistic West where protest movements are commonplace.

Despite the grim current situation, the flexibility of Buddhism to the prevailing political milieu may hold the promise of a future greening

of Buddhism. As state policies increasingly address climate change, Buddhists may have a high likelihood of adjusting by adopting ecophilosophies and environmental policies. Some signs of this are already evident. For instance, the Japanese Sōtō Zen organization adopted its Green Plan already in the mid-1990s as a result of increased climate awareness following the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. More recently, the Taiwanese Buddhist Tsu Chi Foundation has adopted numerous environmental policies, including large-scale recycling, to mitigate climate change.

The future of a green Buddhism looks good. Nevertheless, the question remains: Can the Earth afford to wait for the Buddhists to catch up to the game? 🧘

The text is based on academic research by the author.





*“Can the Earth
afford to wait for
the Buddhists to
catch up to the
game?”*



ECOSELVES: TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION?

By Olivia Fuchs

'I used to think that the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation.'

**James Gustave Speth,
Environmental Lawyer
(2013)**

Speth (2013) emphasises the need for a 'spiritual and cultural transformation' pointing to the fact that we human beings no longer lack an understanding of the facts of climate change and biodiversity loss, but that we need to find ways of making deep and lasting behavioural change. His observation implies that there are both inner spiritual dimensions and outer cultural transformations needed for behavioural change to become lasting and sustainable. How do we do this? How can we integrate the grief, pain and fear

in the face of ecosystems collapse and climate change already happening around the world? How can we take responsibility as citizens of the Global North who have and are still causing most of the carbon emissions that are leading to global warming and work towards ecological justice? And how can we empower ourselves and others to overcome our 'selfishness, greed, and apathy' to take action and contribute to the spiritual and cultural transformation Speth suggests?

In the attempt to answer these questions I have been drawn to making connections between Deep Ecology and my understanding of the Buddhist teachings as well as my Buddhist practice. In this article I will begin to explore the concepts of our 'ecological selves' or 'eco-selves', a phrase coined by Arne Naess with reference to his ideas on self-realization and to the Buddhist concept of the Bodhisattva and the process of inner spiritual transformation, which Josei Toda called 'human revolution'.

Deep Ecology

Arne Naess first mentioned 'Deep Ecology' as a concept in 1973 to differentiate a spiritual,

long-term view of ecology from the contemporary shallow or anthropocentric approach to ecology, which usually focuses on short-term, technological solutions to solving the ecological and climate crisis. Shallow ecology is human-focused in nature and pursues business as usual, without questioning the underlying values, methods and purposes or the relationships of human beings with each other, with themselves and with the natural world.

In contrast Deep Ecology examines the root causes of the crisis, questions the underlying values and principles we live by, and it pursues long-term sustainability by trying to develop alternative behaviours and patterns of action. Deep ecology expresses the belief that our current environmental problems are symptomatic of deeper problems in our societies, which need to be addressed on a fundamental level. It explores and emphasizes the need for individual and cultural change as well as developing a long-range approach that creates institutional practices that are constantly evolving, self-organising and creative. It aims to act as a **wordview** encompassing a diversity of cultural and religious traditions, a **platform** of principles aiming to affect policy and

behavioural change, and a **movement**.

There has been criticism of Naess' attempt to create an overarching worldview, but I believe he was trying to establish a premise that people with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can subscribe to. This is in my opinion similar to the principle of itai doshin or 'unity in diversity' in Nichiren Buddhism. A unifying purpose, such as taking away suffering and bringing joy, or creating a sustainable world based on the respect for all life, can bring people from diverse cultures and backgrounds together and encourage the celebration of each others' differences in the process.

The intent of Deep Ecology, which is based on Gandhian principles of non-violence and has to some extent been influenced by Buddhist ideas, is to contribute

to the flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth. Similar to Buddhism it acknowledges the inherent value of **all** life forms, independent of their usefulness for human purposes, and articulates how present human interference in the various eco-systems is excessive and entirely unsustainable. By adhering to the principles of Deep Ecology Naess proposes that 'the resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present and make possible a more **joyful experience of the connectedness of all things**.' (Naess 2004). Here we can see a connection with our Buddhist concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* (*skt*), 'the co-arising of phenomena' explored later in this article.

The term 'ecology' was first coined by German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1873 as 'the branch of science dealing with the relationship of living things and

their environments'. He established the term by combining the Greek word *oikos* meaning 'habitat, dwelling place, habitation or home' with the word *logia* - the study of. In answer to how this can be applied in practice Naess coined the phrase 'ecological selves' and developed the idea of 'self-realization' or an 'ecological approach to being in the world'. He emphasises that we contain multiple selves and that the idea of 'self' should not be confused with an understanding of an ego 'self'. He tries to shift the understanding of the 'self' away from a narrow or fixed perception of the ego to that of an identification, or a process of identification. Combining the idea of the individual 'self' with their natural habitat '*oikos*' makes us aware of our interconnectedness with each other and the natural world. Similar to Joanna Macy's 'greening of the self', Naess' process of 'self-realization'



towards an 'ecological self' can be understood as a form of practice to realise ourselves as fully living in the world, aware of our interconnectedness with all life on this beautiful planet as well as the whole cosmos.

Buddhist thought

We can relate Naess' idea of self-realization, or the process of identifying with our 'ecoselves', with the Buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva, a person on the path towards 'awakening' or Buddhahood, one who because of their compassion for all suffering life refrains from entering nirvana. Bodhisattvas are people in the process of transforming their 'small, egocentric selves', full of attachment to their desires, and often prey to the three poisons of greed, anger and delusion, into their 'greater selves' filled with generosity and compassion towards all living beings, and all of nature.

Ultimately, this is a process of softening the identification with our small ego, the microcosm of the self, and loosening our attachment to it. At the same time we can strengthen an understanding of ourselves as part of the macrocosm of the universe, thereby extending our perception, and potentially our influence. We journey from somebody alienated from ourselves, each other, and our planet, to someone inherently connected with ourselves, each other, and all life. In the process we contribute to bridging the

three divides inherent in our age, identified by Scharmer (2018) and his colleagues as the spiritual, social and ecological divides. The three divides express the fundamental interrelated crises of our times:

Spiritually, many of us are alienated from ourselves and our natural habitat. This manifests itself as the increasing isolation of human beings and a growing mental health crisis

Socially, we are alienated from each other, living in cultures of competition, materialism and social injustices such as racism, sexism, and the increasing divide between rich and poor

Ecologically, we mostly live in cultures that are alienated from the earth, nature and the cosmos, exploiting and depleting nature and causing the 6th mass extinction in the process

We can attempt to bridge these divides and develop our 'ecological' or 'eco-selves' through inner spiritual and outer action-based practice, thereby deepening our understanding of interconnection and, at the same time, contribute to collectively creating a culture of cooperation and creativity that focuses on quality of life rather than materialist pursuits.

In the Lotus Sutra's 'Emerging from the Earth' chapter countless bodhisattvas rise up, emerging from the earth, promising to work towards elevating the spiritual state of humankind. Daisaku

Ikeda (2001) suggests that these 'Bodhisattvas of the Earth' are 'eternal activists' in a state of 'incomplete completeness' who partake 'of a state of life of boundless joy and completion (the effect of Buddhahood)' while at the same time taking action to take away suffering and lead more people to enlightenment. David Loy applies this bodhisattva ideal to what he calls the path of 'Ecosattva' (Loy 2018), a way for Buddhists to engage with the climate and ecological crisis, which involves a double practice of inner meditation and outer activism. This is discussed further by Jake Lyne in his article on the 'Ecosattva' but here I would like to draw a connection with the practice of 'human revolution' coined by Josei Toda to express the process of spiritual inner transformation, of bringing forth our full human potential, that we can achieve through Buddhist practice. By growing in altruism and compassion we can transform our 'lesser self', bound by self-concern and our ego, toward our 'greater self' capable of caring and taking action for the sake of others, and for all life and nature. By awakening to our mission here and now, at this critical time in the evolution of humankind, we can develop our 'ecoselves', our selves embedded in our natural habitat of the earth, our original home, developing our lived experience of interconnection with nature and all life-forms. We can extend our bodhisattva path to include all living beings and the earth itself, in a continual exchange of dual

A person stands in silhouette on a rocky ledge, looking up at a large, natural rock archway. The archway frames a view of a cloudy sky. The surrounding landscape is lush with green trees and vegetation. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

**‘To illustrate,
environment
is like the shadow,
and life, the body.**

**Without the body,
no shadow can exist,
and without life,
no environment.**

**In the same way,
life is shaped by its
environment.’**

**‘Buddhism is like the body,
and society like the shadow.
When the body bends,
so does the shadow.’**

inner and outer practice, becoming 'ecosattvas' in the process.

By doing that we contribute to a collective awakening. As Thich Nhat Hanh said: 'The Buddha attained individual awakening. Now we need a collective enlightenment to stop the course of destruction.'

Arguably one of the most fundamental and all-encompassing contributions that Buddhism makes conceptually to collective awakening and a shift in consciousness is the metaphor of Indra's Net, a vast interconnected web encompassing the entire universe with a beautiful jewel at each intersection which reflects all the other jewels, always interacting, at times initiating and at others responding. This image explains the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* (skt), 'the co-arising of phenomena' in which the part contains the whole and where it is impossible to 'isolate a separate, continuous self' (Macy 1990). It is an expression of 'radical interrelationship' (Barnhill 2001) encompassing both identity and difference, which is translated variously as 'dependent origination', 'interdependent co-arising' or 'interbeing' showing how complex the concept is and how difficult it is to convey in words. The metaphor of Indra's web expresses the 'relational dimension' of Buddhism, the interrelatedness of all things, which encompasses 'not just all sentient beings but every aspect of the ecosystem' and ultimately the entire ecosphere (Sponberg 1997).

Indra's net tries to express the paradox of how the individual parts articulate themselves in all their uniqueness, and how at the same time they are part of an all-encompassing whole. It shows the infinite possibilities of how individual agency can affect the whole system, at the same time emphasising that our Western understanding of an independent individual self is a delusion. The Japanese Buddhist concept of 'esho funi', the indivisibility of self and environment, expressed as 'two but not two', is another way of articulating how the individual part is embedded in its environment. Nichiren Daishonin applies the metaphor of a 'body and its shadow' in 13th Century Japan to express the reflection and interdependence of the individual and their environment:

'To illustrate, environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body, no shadow can exist, and without life, no environment. In the same way, life is shaped by its environment.'

and

'Buddhism is like the body, and society like the shadow. When the body bends, so does the shadow.'

Here we can begin to understand how our inner spiritual change combined with our consequent actions can affect changes in our environment. By focusing on quality of life, including ephemeral qualities such as compassion, community, creativity, connection and joy, rather than ever-increasing higher standards of living, we can

collectively contribute to the future we want to experience, building resilience in the face of systems collapse.

Language and metaphor

One of the ways in which shifts in consciousness are expressed and reflected is in our use of language, stories and metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1981) have found that metaphors are 'pervasive in everyday life, not just in language'. Metaphors express and influence our conceptual systems which in turn affect our thoughts and actions, and paradigm shifts entail changes in the metaphors that guide us. The language we use therefore expresses how we experience life, simultaneously influencing how we think and feel. By investigating and changing our language we can shift perception, understanding and motivation. As Reed and Rothenberg (1993) said: 'a questioning ecology sees beyond the forest and the trees to the root metaphors and acts of how humanity has framed the world'. The metaphors we envisage can turn our understanding of life on its head, or gently nudge us in a different direction as we have already seen in the example of Indra's net. New metaphors can promote transformative ways of being, relating, experiencing, collaborating and co-creating the world.

Poetic expression can also be very powerful and there are many instances in which Buddhist teachers and proponents of deep



Picture: clay-banks-unsplash

ecology have used language to shift consciousness. An influential poetic metaphor, sometimes seen as the beginning of the deep ecology movement was Aldo Leopold's 'Thinking Like a Mountain'. He created the term in relation to a wolf's howl as heard from the perspective of a mountain. It came from his personal experience as a young man, when he killed a wolf getting to her just in time to see life die away in the wolf's eyes. He had thought that fewer wolves would mean a hunter's paradise but 'after seeing the green fire die' he sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with this view (Leopold 1949/2020). This experience sparked a new deepened understanding of his own relationship within the natural world.

'Thinking like a mountain' suggests having a different and more contemplative and reflective

perspective. It implies a longer, geological time frame through which to understand the natural world, and it changes our experiential sense of belonging to the Earth. Integrating a perspective of geological 'deep time' (Macfarlane 2020) it provides a radical and transformational new way of experiencing life and compelling us to think in the future, contemplating the effects of our present actions on future generations. The phrase 'thinking like a mountain' was taken up by deep ecologists John Seed, Joanna Macy and Pat Fleming (1988) in their book of the same name and has become one of the catch phrases of the deep ecology movement.

The language we use and how we express ourselves, reflects our cultures' ways of understanding the world. It charts our relationships, our ways of conceiving and experiencing ourselves and the

world around us. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2020) explains the difference between our English noun-based language, which reflects a culture that is obsessed with things and with separating human beings conceptually from the rest of the living world, and her native indigenous language of Potawatomi. In English only 30% of the language are verbs whereas in Potawatomi 70% of all words are verbs allowing for much greater flexibility and nuance of expression through the use of conjugation and tense. For example, the word ocean 'bay' is in Potawatomi *wiikwegama* – 'to be a bay', an everchanging present iteration of water. In English, however, it is a noun defined by humans implying the water is dead, 'trapped between its shores and contained by the word' rather than a moving ever-changing event experienced in the now (Wall Kimmerer 2020). The English language tends to divide the world between humans

and things. Objectifying nature creates barriers and opens the door to exploitation. By realizing how much language affects our perception, and by developing new ways of expressing ourselves we can potentially influence our ways of being in the world, and vice versa. As Thomas Berry wrote 'we must say of the universe that it is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.'

Narrative is also an important aspect of language and communication, and in many ways we understand our lives as narrative, trying to make meaning through stories. Fisher (1987) suggests that at a fundamental level humankind is 'homo narrans'. Narrative is one of the main ways of giving coherence to our experience and it is therefore useful to examine its potential, if we want to affect both behavioural and systemic change.

Sharing stories and experiences can provide new perspective, generate empathy, compassion and understanding, create community and resilience, and contribute to healing. By listening to others' stories and sharing our own truth we begin the process of creating a collective tapestry in which 'truth ... is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction' (Bakhtin 1984). Together we can weave a rich narrative tapestry and create a space for a 'polyphony of voices' (Bakhtin 1984) that can help us reinterpret some of the old narratives, which have led

us to our current state of affairs. By collectively allowing new stories to emerge and by weaving them together into a rich tapestry we can contribute to a 'cultural transformation' and restore what Carr (1986) calls a 'narrative coherence in the face of an ever-threatening, impending chaos at all levels'.

To explore new narratives we may explore sabotage techniques suggested by Brian Eno (2023) in a recent RSA talk, imagining first what we don't want the future to be in order to then design the opposite. Hypothetical thinking and new ways of conceiving the narratives we live by can also be encouraged by imaginative questions using the word 'if'. Asking 'what if' helps us go beyond the current perceived reality and stimulates what might be (Lederach 2005). 'If' is a simple starting point to delve into the imagination, explore possibilities, alternatives and multiple realities. It provides an impetus for the further development of the creative process and can help stimulate the imagination needed to transcend current realities and assumptions, and to re-imagine existing narratives. Aldo Leopold explored this in his essay 'If I were the Wind' in which he imagines himself as the wind making music and surging across the grassy sloughs, accompanying the geese on their travels. Being able to imagine ourselves as other beings, as part of the earth, as natural elements, may help us transform how we perceive our ways of



being in the world, and contribute to creating new narratives. The supposition of 'if' can help us make imaginative leaps towards a deeper understanding of ourselves as part of nature and the more-than-human world (Abrams 1996). It helps overcome our imagined separation of human beings as being separate from ourselves, each other and other beings, and it can lead to a conceptual change. John Seed (1988) explains this potential process of transformation as a 'spiritual change', exemplified in how the thought 'I am protecting the rainforest' evolves to 'I am part of the rainforest protecting myself' or even 'I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking'.

Exploring how we can shift our self-perception through our use of language, metaphor and narrative is something we can all do. We can all contribute to shifts in language. We can choose what we say and do, how we think, what actions we take every day

to create in this moment the future we want to live. We can decide not to use metaphors that reflect the world as a mechanical or monetised place and to change our language to express how we want to live and be in the world. To give a small personal example I have recently made a few shifts in expressions. For instance, rather than talking about 'spending time with' someone, a phrase that contributes to the view that 'time is money', I choose instead to say 'sharing time with'. For me this reflects an understanding of time being a gift and honours the rich and deep transformation that can happen between, within and through an exchange with others. It also acts both as a reminder to myself and hopefully as a tiny provocation when communicating with others. We can combine a scientific narrative of evolution with poetic and engaged ways of viewing our role as human beings nested within the rest of the world. I would suggest that

we can all contribute to creating what Tucker and Swimme (2011) call 'a transformative cosmological story that engages human energy for a future that is sustaining and sustainable.'

Deep ecology provides a spiritual dimension to the environmental movement and encompasses a holistic and embodied approach that brings together thinking, feeling, spirituality and action (Henning 2002). I hope that our Buddhist philosophies and practices combined with the insights of deep ecology can continue to make contributions to the environmental movement and the 'spiritual and cultural transformation' needed. By deepening and widening our understanding and sharing our insights with those around us we can and are contributing to developing our own eco-selves as well as collective enlightenment with the hope of inspiring people to feel motivated to start the change themselves. 🧘





Further reading/ references

- Abram, D. (1996) *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language*. USA: Random House.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: Minnesota Press.
- Barnhill, D. and Gottlieb, R. S. (2001) *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Ground*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Fisher, W.R. (1987) *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Henning, D. (2002/2006) *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology*. Special Edition by the World Buddhist University.
- Ikeda, D., Saito, K., Endo, T. and Suda, H. (2001) *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: a Discussion, Vol 3*. World Tribune Press.
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980) *Metaphors we Live By*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005) *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leopold, Aldo (2020) *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*. Penguin Random House, UK.
- Loy, D.R. (2018) *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Macfarlane, R. (2020) *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*. Penguin Random House, UK.
- Macy, J. (1990) *The Greening of the Self* in Badiner, A. H. (ed) (1990) *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*. Parallax Press, Berkeley, California.
- Naess, A. (2008) *Ecology of Wisdom*. Penguin Random House.
- Reed, P., Rothenberg, D. (1993) *Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Scharmer, O. (2018) *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Seed, J., Macy J., Fleming, P., Naess, A. (1988) *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*. New Society Publishers, Philadelphia.
- Sponberg, A. (1997) 'Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion' in M.E. Tucker and D.R. William (eds) *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*. Cambridge: Harvard University press.
- Swimme, B. and Tucker, M.E. (2011) *Journey of the Universe*. Yale.
- Wall Kimmerer, R. (2013/2020) *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Penguin Random House, UK.

A person with long, dark hair, seen from behind, stands with their arms outstretched, looking out over a calm body of water. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a soft, hazy sky. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a backpack. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Being the Change: EBU and the Sustainable Environment on Earth for All Beings (SEE-FAB) Project

By Karolina Ek, Lydia von Gerttenand and Jacob 'Jōshin' Halcomb

Introduction

In 2020, the United Nations Secretary General announced “the world is facing a triple planetary emergency -a climate crisis, a nature crisis, and a pollution crisis. These are causing profound suffering: lost lives, lost jobs, rising hunger, declining health and widening damage from disasters.¹”

The necessary environmental knowledge, expertise, and solutions are available, all that is required is informed, careful action. Additionally, as Buddhists practice to cultivate compassion, ethical and moral behaviour, and wisdom; the call to action is even greater.

In Europe there are approximately 4 million Buddhists and over 500 million worldwide with affiliated institutions, temples, and centres in large or moderate sized facilities. Buddhists centres and institutions present a great opportunity as places for taking action to address the three crises. Additionally, Europe and her inhabitants have demonstrated continuing

leadership and commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which address climate action, biodiversity, and pollution. A number of individuals, both members of EBU and not, recognized the need and opportunity, and the EBU launched the Sustainable Environment on Earth for All Beings (SEE-FAB) project in late 2021 in partnership with SEfficiency, a sustainability consulting group. As of now, approximately 13 centres in France, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and Korea have expressed interest taking action to reduce their impact and strengthen and improve their communities.

Rationale

Before we explore the specifics of the project, it may help to understand the general motivation and science behind this approach. The project focuses on the collective behaviour of our Dharma centres because it is here where long-term, social change can take place. It isn't just the technologies, buildings, and other infrastructure that locks us into high future carbon emissions and continuous environmental degradation. It is

also the ‘normative’ ideas, the way we think about energy, waste, water, etc. and the related cultural behaviours and activities around that use that can lock in future emissions. We can see this often in our own lifestyles, our habits at home, in our family upbringing and in the expectations promoted through television and social media. Traveling for winter holiday ski trips, summers at the beach, shopping sales, meat at every meal, and so on.

Dharma centres can offer a place to learn, model, and promote-by-doing new norms and new environmentally friendly behaviours, expectations, and ways of being. Adding our own voices to the growing chorus of those not only calling for change but demonstrating the change we wish to see. This underlying motivation for the project reflects findings that show how minority groups can change and shape the emergence of new social practices and change existing behaviours. This type of action and its role in addressing the climate crisis is explored in Chapter 5 of Working Group III's contribution to the 6th Assessment Report of the IPCC.

¹ - Source: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20422.doc.htm> accessed December 6, 2021



Picture: pesce-huang-unsplash

SEE-FAB's Approach

The SEE-FAB pilot project seeks to support centres in this effort by providing knowledge and tools thereby building capacity for concrete action, consistent with science, on climate, biodiversity, and pollution. The principal approach for the project draws upon the Eco-Management approach (also known as environmental management system or EMS). Namely the **"Plan, Do, Check, Act"** approach. Meaning the centres first map out their activities and, to the extent possible, measure the impact of their activities and operations on energy use, water use, resource use, and biodiversity. The first step, **Plan**, involves measuring and getting a fundamental understanding of where a centre is having its most impact. This is a key step; it helps centres understand what interventions that are most

efficient for them to focus on to have the greatest possible impact and helps to identify concrete opportunities for action -the next step in the Eco-Management approach: **Do**.

Understanding where a centre has large impacts gives the members of the centre an opportunity to discuss, evaluate, and collectively decide and take action to improve

the environmental sustainability of their facility. To help guide the evaluation and selection of actions, SEE-FAB suggests considering four key "hot-spots." These are areas that, for most households and organisations, have the greatest opportunity for positive impact. 1) Mobility/Transport; 2) Nutrition/Food; 3) Housing/Buildings; and 4) Goods and Services.



When considering what and how to foster change in the four hotspots, there are two helpful frameworks for shaping the kind of action centres can take. The first is the mitigation framework of “**Avoid-Shift-Improve.**” The second is for biodiversity related actions and applies the mitigation and conservation hierarchy’s 4Rs: Refrain, Reduce, Restore, and Renew.

As an example, say we are a centre in a major city, and we have completed a study of our energy use. Looking at electricity and heating bills, the types of lightbulbs we have, surveyed members to understand how they commute to the centre for events and teachings, and other areas relevant to our situation. We find that lighting and heating the space are the two largest energy uses since most of our members are able to commute by tram, bus or bicycle. We apply the “Avoid-Shift-Improve” framework and decide to **avoid** using lights when the building is unoccupied and when there is enough sunlight, we avoid turning on all the lights. For the times we can’t avoid their use, we **shift** to task lighting, for example using a desk lamp instead of the over-head lamps throughout the room. For the remainder of the time, we work to **improve** the lamps we use, switching to LED for any lamp that burns out.

After working with the second step ‘do’, we then measure and **check**. Did the energy bill decrease? Are more visitors carpooling or taking public transportation? Are



Picture: steven rojas_unsplash

we achieving the environmental benefits we expected? If not, then what can we do to **Act** and change the approach or better communicate to our members, so they adjust their behaviour? In brief, this the Eco-Management approach the SEE-FAB project draws upon. The other approach, the 4Rs for Biodiversity action will be further elaborated later in the pilot stage. At present, given limited resources and time, SEE-FAB is initially focusing on energy use in centres.

Youth Engagement

SEE-FAB, through the great suggestion of our Buddhist colleagues in Sweden, is promoting and supporting the

engagement of youth in this endeavour. As the impacts of climate change intensify, it is today’s youth and future generations that will face the worst of its effects. For this reason, it is increasingly seen as imperative to engage and empower young individuals, as active citizens, in environmental initiatives and policy. Dharma centres, as spaces for promoting new norms and new ways of being, have the potential to influence society positively when engaging with the wider community. Working with youth is a way for young individuals to take what they have learned to make positive changes in their home environments.

The SEE-FAB project encourages centres to conduct their

environmental reviews and implement changes together with a youth group. It does this through teaching activities in manageable sections that can be conducted in the course of a couple of hours each. The youth group could be a scout group, a local sports club, an after-school activity group, or youth already familiar with your centre. The engagement is designed to empower young individuals in your communities, allowing them to learn and take part in making real improvements for sustainability by listening, reflecting, collecting data, and contributing with new ideas. This way, Buddhist centres can become spaces for co-creation and intergenerational unity towards the shared goal of creating a sustainable environment on earth for all beings.

Where we are today:

The project, in development for approximately a year now, is currently pilot testing guidance on assessing Energy impacts with Yeshin Norbu in Stockholm,

Sweden. Through the project's partnership with SEfficiency, a sustainability consultancy, the team has produced short instructional manual and several tables and spreadsheets to support the engagement of youth in data collection on a centre's energy-use. In addition to the guidance document, the SEE-FAB project presented at the 2022 EBU AGM in Paris. The team facilitated an abbreviated "Eco-Charrette", which is a structured brainstorming session for developing ideas and identifying possible actions Buddhist centres could take to reduce their impacts.

After completing the initial testing of the guidance and making any changes needed it will be rolled out to other participating centres. Ongoing meetings among these centres will be organized in order to allow for peer-to-peer learning and sharing of good practice, support with questions, and so forth. It is our hope that through this approach - centres helping

other centres, this approach can continue to spread among the members of the EBU and beyond.

Next Steps:

SEE-FAB currently has a number of centres beginning with the pilot phase. We are testing the initial energy guidance document and data collection method. Upon completion of this initial phase the project will explore expanding into the other critical areas of water, resources, and biodiversity. Ultimately, this will be dependent upon available funding and resources. With the pilot under way, SEE-FAB partners are not actively seeking new centres or organisations for this initial test phase. However, we welcome and actively encourage centres interested in making these changes to get in touch with the team. Case studies or examples of environmental sustainability measures in your own facilities are very much welcome. Please feel free to contact the team by writing: SEE-FAB@SEfficiency.org 🙏



Picture: christina-wocintechchat-com-unsplash

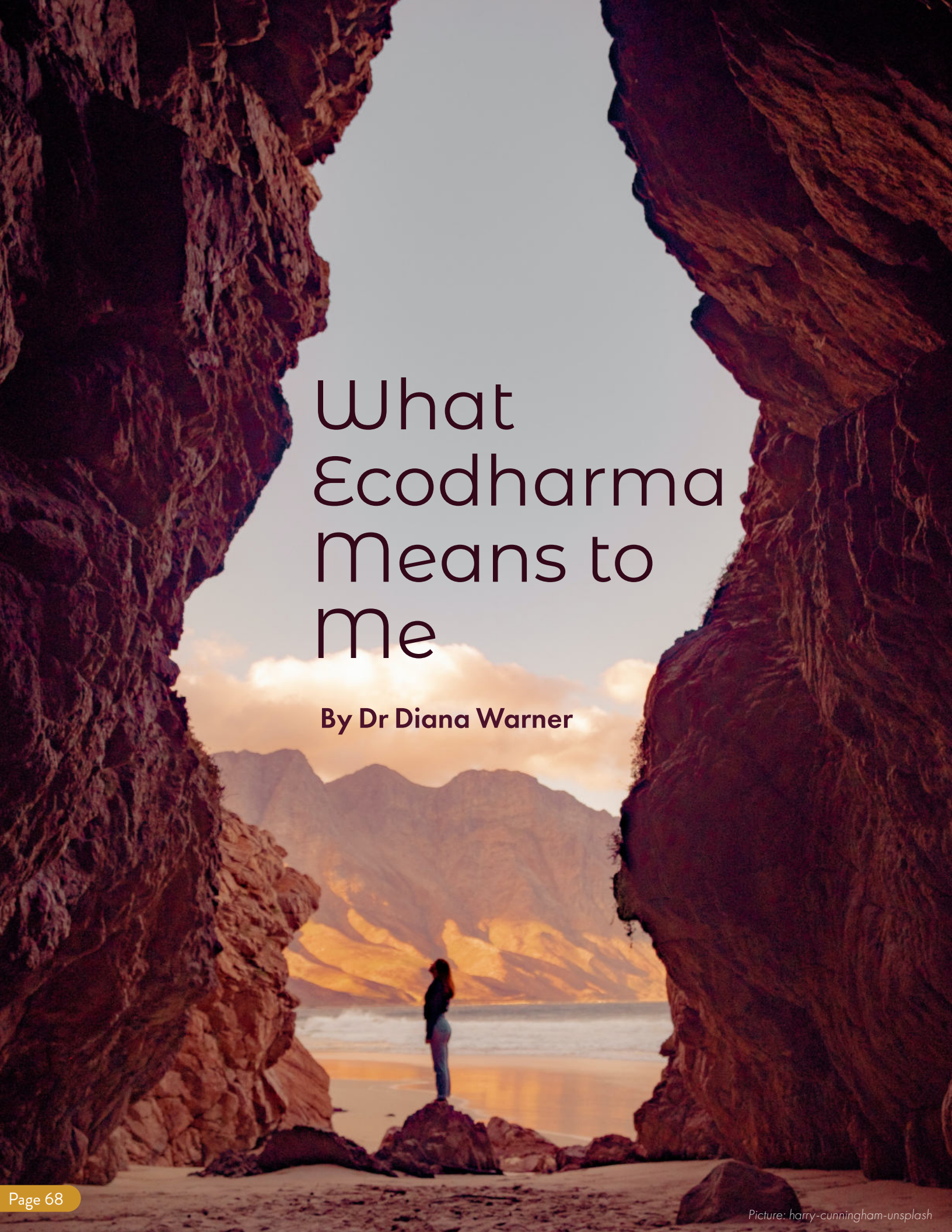
A₁ L₁ L₁

Y₄ O₁ U₁

N₁ E₁ E₁ D₂

I₁ S₁

L₁ E₁ S₁ S₁

A person stands in the center of a large, dark cave opening, looking out towards a sunset. The cave walls are rugged and textured, framing the view. Outside, a beach is visible with waves crashing against the shore. In the background, a range of mountains is silhouetted against the bright, orange and yellow sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

What Ecodharma Means to me

By Dr Diana Warner

Ecodharma was present in my mind before I knew Buddhism. I think it is present naturally in the minds of those I meet and work with on that other path – the path of civil resistance, for life and for justice. When I describe this to people taking action, they reply no, they are selfish and full of faults. I ask them to show me someone who is not.

There seems to me no separation between ecodharma, the dharma, and action. My teacher, Simon Child, once suggested that my life's koan may be to work out how others can perform actions which they know will result in the destruction of the earth, or destroy other people's lives. I have a strong sense of justice and wish to relieve suffering, started meditating to become a more efficient activist, and took the Buddhist lay vows because I was practising them anyway. With my Buddhist vows I have started what seems to be a constant journey.

When I started this article, I was staying in a hut in Wales for three weeks, noisy river behind it. I was enjoying wonderful sunshine after several days of mist, damp, and cloud. Regular texts and emails told me about amazing things people in Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, and international groups

were doing, and the harsher and harsher punishments they received. I was worn out after taking several actions with Insulate Britain in quick succession, Autumn 2021, and then three periods of imprisonment leading up to June 2022. I have several more trials coming up in 2023, the first in January.

The Constant Journey:

Finding out who I am, which includes the present, recent past, past, previous generations.

Understanding my limits and my place in the communities of earth and humans.

Seeking truth - my own, the earth's, and that of others.

Wise action, meditation, and reflection.

Imagination: seeing others as they may be. This can be difficult right now.

Underlying Principles:

Compassion

Justice

Beauty: I had lost my sense of beauty after my last stint in prison. A friend, Mark Ovland, told me he is part of a group exploring how beauty can be integral to the dharma path, and I was interested

but didn't feel a connection. Three weeks later I was walking the hills of central Wales, observing sunshine at play on the distant panorama, valley paths thick with oak leaves, delicate red roots thrusting into earth from acorns. Here is beauty and mystery. We never permanently lose our attributes, appreciation of beauty among them. I thank my friends Marian and Nick for having hosted me in their beautiful home.

Why me?

Early experiences / family history

My peculiar qualities of reflection, independence, stubbornness, and sense of responsibility. I now pass responsibility on to you.

The place for Buddhist exploration:

Early experiences, Jewish and colonial history

Privilege of being a white doctor

Hiding my light under a bushel

Being female in a male dominant world

Delving ever deeper into myself to find courage

Unlearning in prison

Freedom as a state of mind



Picture: diana-parkhouse-unsplash

Right action

In the 2022 Reith lecture on freedom of religion, Rowan Williams reflected that religious conviction requires action both moral and visible. Imposing your religious practices onto others, because you believe they are the only correct ways to practice, becomes tyranny. Acting on the conviction that every human deserves to be treated with dignity, allows society to learn and change.

Diana's list of suggestions to consider (note this is a personal list reflecting my own pathway and what I have learned):

I was about forty when I realised that there was something very wrong with where Western society was heading. The first thing I did was to make space to find out what was happening in greater depth. At the time my children were ten and seven. My work was well paid and I could work less while we maintained a good standard

of living. To work less felt like a privilege, a luxury.

Now, making time for investigating the truth about how you live, how it impacts others and future lives, is no luxury but an essential part of the Buddhist vow of not killing.

Why are United Nations bodies calling for transformation of society and the way we live? If you aren't sure or are complacent about it, find out more. Check what is going on within yourself, that you are not acting.

Consider three-fold action: adapt your own lifestyle; observe, and possibly change, your conversation with others; and work with others to push for change.

Take part in the development of strong interfaith and secular connections and networks; help form an unstoppable community demanding and making change.

Help support those on the frontline, especially indigenous peoples.

Understand why peaceful activists in the Global North are being

imprisoned in the UK and Europe, North America and Australia. They are few. Support them by writing letters to prisoners and /or writing for publication or on social media, talking on local radio and in your communities. What can you do to promote a positive dialogue for transformation? What do those who oppose change fear?

Consider promoting Citizens Assemblies as a publicly inclusive way to direct change. Citizens Assemblies could, for example, replace both the London Assembly and the House of Lords.

Give spare money away wisely, to facilitate the work of others.

Live how you want to be.

Who am I?

Early experiences / family history

My peculiar qualities of reflection, independence, stubbornness, and sense of responsibility.

I am 63, mother of two, middle of three children, born into a Jewish family. As children we attended

Hebrew school on Sundays and we observed the most important religious festivals. There was much love in the family but also hardship. My father had escaped the holocaust at the age of seventeen; many of his extended family were killed including his mother. As a child my mother experienced a traumatic separation from her father during the invasion of Singapore by Japan. Both these events left their marks on me, especially my father's experience which we knew of but were not to speak about.

Zen meditation has helped me uncover a relationship with my paternal grandmother. My awareness spans five generations: from my grandmother Martha Lewen, whom nobody saved, to my granddaughter not-yet-born, whose future lies in the balance.

I live with face blindness (prosopagnosia), but only discovered that my disability has a name recently. It's estimated that between one and two per cent of the population have face blindness to varying degrees. I do not recognise people by the layout of their faces in the normal way, but over the years have learned to recognise people by hairstyle and clothes, how they walk, and by their voices. As a child starting a new class, I would recognise who was who long after friendship groups had been formed. This increased my natural shyness.

I have completed a full career as a GP, and am now retired. I had thought that I would travel, write, practise yoga and maybe become a yoga teacher or teach writing

for wellbeing after retiring. I have done none of these (so far)!

Independence, determination, and sense of responsibility

My mother's family trace their origins to Sephardi Jews who fled the Spanish inquisition and found homes in Baghdad, where they were welcomed and thrived. My maternal grandmother, Flossie, fled an arranged marriage and came to Singapore to stay with her older sister. I inherit these qualities of independence and determination.

A pamphlet about antisemitism suggests that a Jewish person will take on responsibility for their own wellbeing without relying on other people; that self-reliance, almost to the exclusion of others, has arisen after generations of persecution. I think this runs true. But I have always empathised with others, and perhaps because of this have felt a sense of personal responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole human family not shared by the majority of people. However, in this globalised world, no one can separate their own and their family's wellbeing, or their tribe's, from the wellbeing of everyone. For civilisation to survive we need to learn this immediately. We must also realise how reliant we humans are on the web of life, especially life in the oceans.

Colonialism and the privilege of being a white doctor

Hiding my light under a bushel

Being female in a male dominant world

Truth is hard to uncover. Yet before we speak our truth, we have to find it. Truth can come quickly, in a flash of insight; or slowly and sometimes painfully. The path of ecodharma is to be open to enquiry: to careful observation; to critical evaluation of what we see, hear, and do; to constantly check where we are emotionally and how that impacts us; acknowledge, hold, and look at the sudden surprising thoughts that come. These skills improve with meditation practice such as Chan, similar to Zen, which is the tradition I follow.

I am aware of seeming contradictions inside myself; maybe the dharma path is to understand the whole being that contains the contradictions – a whole that is sometimes revealed as one with the earth and its elements, holding the mystery and spirit of life.

I started meditating when I was forty. At some point I had a thought I recognised from the bible: "Don't hide your light under a bushel". This became a recurring thought of increasing frequency and painfulness. I remember it coming up at several silent retreats, until I was forced to acknowledge that yes, I was hiding my light under a bushel. I was tucking my light well down beneath a short, thick bush. What did that mean?

The process of revealing my light, of coming into my power, was slow, practical (came out of action, not through sitting), unfathomable, and is still evolving. A part of my reticence to show myself was learned in childhood. However, other more general



conditions were at play which may be revealed by looking at colonialism, the privilege of being a white doctor, and being female in a male dominant world. It's worth exploring these here to show the power of self-enquiry, and to deepen awareness of the conditioning imposed upon women, children, and men.

Some years ago, a research paper was presented on the radio. The paper looked at attention listeners had paid to different speakers, and the influence each speaker had on the listener. The findings were stark: notwithstanding whether the listener was female or male, almost everyone paid more attention to the male speaker than to the female speaker; and listeners were more likely to be influenced by the male even when the female speaker was known to be the most knowledgeable.

"I don't do that!" Paying attention to my own attention during the next radio talk, I found that I did. During a discussion I took part in, I even noticed myself deferring to the opinion of a male speaker despite knowing more about the topic than he did. Once recognised, soon dealt with. However, such learned tendencies die hard and I still have to be vigilant.

Male hatred of women is taking almost unbearable form in Iran right now. But it is present and extremely harmful throughout society here, as well as being internalised in women such as myself. You can see it play out in the courts and prison systems: women are sent to prison while

men routinely receive community service for similar crimes. No thought appears to be given to the devastating impacts on children who are separated from their mothers.

While hiding my light, and being female in a male dominant society, I have lived my working life as a privileged white doctor. People came to consult me and I was accustomed to them listening to me and accepting my advice. I learned to speak in a variety of ways so I could communicate and listen well. Now, when I stand up as defendant in court, I can speak to both judge and jury on their own terms. Most of the time I am regarded with respect. Here are inherent contradictions.

A doctor has a specific role and is expected to behave in a certain way. Doctors are in a position to help people stay healthy in society, and can be held up as superior to ordinary people. This goes two ways: I had taken on the role fully, and it took me a long time to see major flaws in the structure. High esteem and deference towards doctors are cultural; in Russia most doctors were traditionally women, and doctors' status and pay lower.

Half way through my career it struck me that I was prescribing too many antidepressants. Antidepressants had become sticking plasters to patch people up so that they could keep going in society under unsatisfactory conditions that were harming their health. I resigned and took up work in a deprived area, where I

thought I could see more tangible benefits to my work.

In 2018, evidence of the extent of the climate and ecological emergencies was coming in thick and fast. I was checking the hips of a six-week-old baby for a condition called congenital hip dysplasia which, if unnoticed, would cause severe hip pain in her twenties and thirties. I suddenly realised that I was missing the point. All doctors were missing the point. By ignoring the climate and ecological emergencies, we were ignoring the most important things that would affect her health as she grew to adulthood and beyond. This realisation changed my life. At that moment I vowed to do everything I could to make her life as healthy as possible, and that vow has led me to this point.

Unlearning

In early summer 2020 I joined Beyond Politics, renamed the Burning Pink Party. That summer I was imprisoned on remand for four weeks for planning to throw paint at Trade Union buildings, including the British Medical Association. The trial is due to be heard in January and February 2023.

I had needed to show fellow doctors that change was urgent. Doctors were largely turning a blind eye to the effects on health of climate change, pollution, and gross inequity. Instead, doctors were occupied only with treating the effects – lung conditions and cancer, for example. I went on hunger strike for five days while

in prison, to try to show doctors the urgency of the climate and ecological emergencies and the need for change. I stopped the hunger strike after five days, when a friend emailed to say that I was already making a difference, and doctors were talking about it.

That first time in prison I was a climate activist, a doctor, and not like other prisoners.

Yet the last time I was imprisoned I did not feel different from other prisoners. I think important reasons for the change were lack of agency, a feeling of powerlessness within a punitive regime not really concerned about prisoners' wellbeing; the poor diet which became more of an issue as the weeks passed; and, most importantly, my growing understanding of other women prisoners and their circumstances. The way I was imprisoned also made a difference.

The courts are not safeguarding us, but maintain the status quo. In May 2022, I glued my hand to a glass partition inside a courtroom instead of pleading guilty or not guilty of obstructing a road. This was a separate act of civil resistance to urge judges and lawyers to apply the law morally. In the court I spoke about Angus Rose and Wyn Bruce. Angus Rose had just finished a prolonged hunger strike in front of Parliament, with the aim of making sure that MPs were properly briefed on the climate emergency. Wyn Bruce had self-immolated in front of the US Supreme Court. He had committed this final act, to

make sure the judges knew that the ecocide law in front of them is a matter of life or death.

I was charged with criminal damage for leaving a glue handprint on the glass and interrupting court procedure. During that trial for gluing my hand in court, I repeated what I had said about Angus Rose and Wyn Bruce. I explained that my ninety-year-old mother had just become seriously ill; I needed to visit her straight afterwards. Fortunately, she improved. However, the judge reacted as if we had challenged his personal authority, and gave co-defendant Ana and I three-month prison sentences. I heard him say "How dare you have done that in MY court? This is the most violent act you could have done to be tried in this courtroom." He had

transferred his own angry or violent reaction, onto us.

Colonialism and entitlement - what are we up against?

There is a Buddhist tradition to know the lineage of your teachers, likening it to the importance of knowing the source of the water you drink in case you have to go out and find water yourself. We must understand what prevents change, or else struggle in the dark.

My understanding is that our problems are caused by power imbalance. Gross inequity exists between individuals, within and between countries, and between continents. Financial and economic models, and the arms industry, work to maintain inequity.

Gross power imbalance in Europe stems back to the feudal system and (in the UK) to the enclosures. Power imbalance was hugely aggravated by colonialism. The mindset is one of entitlement: life on Earth is there to be used (used up); other people exist to be used (the other is considered inferior and / or dehumanised).

The ideas of economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are results of the idea of entitlement. Economic growth calculations are made to follow the needs of entitlement. They ignore the effects of industry, extraction, and pollution on living plants and animals, including humans. This model is harmful and pervasive, undermining the integrity and humanity of everyone. Application of the law takes little account of



people the world over, treating them as if they exist only to serve the economy, and takes no account of human beings who get in the way.

Weapons are made to be used. In the West, the arms lobby is powerful. The arms industry thrives on the arms race, conflict, and war. The industry needs the arms trade to exist. Weapons need to be made in quantity, otherwise cost of manufacture would be prohibitive. UK soldiers are stationed in foreign countries to help maintain or operate the weapons sold: in the words of one X-soldier he was working "as a mercenary".

Entitlement (most specific to the UK).

In his book 'Wounded Leaders', Nick Duffell explains why UK leaders think they are infallible, and why party politics played out in the House of Commons is adversarial (unlike more cooperative styles of government in Europe). Top private schools in the UK are called 'public schools'; most people in top government positions boarded in public schools, sometimes from the age of eight. Using his own and others' experiences Duffell was able to analyse how, as adults, X-boarders cannot allow themselves to make mistakes. They stop seeing their mistakes. They learn how to finely categorise and place problems in silos to avoid seeing contradictions. It rings true in medicine: for example, doctors have only recently changed their prescribing to take greater account of harmful interactions

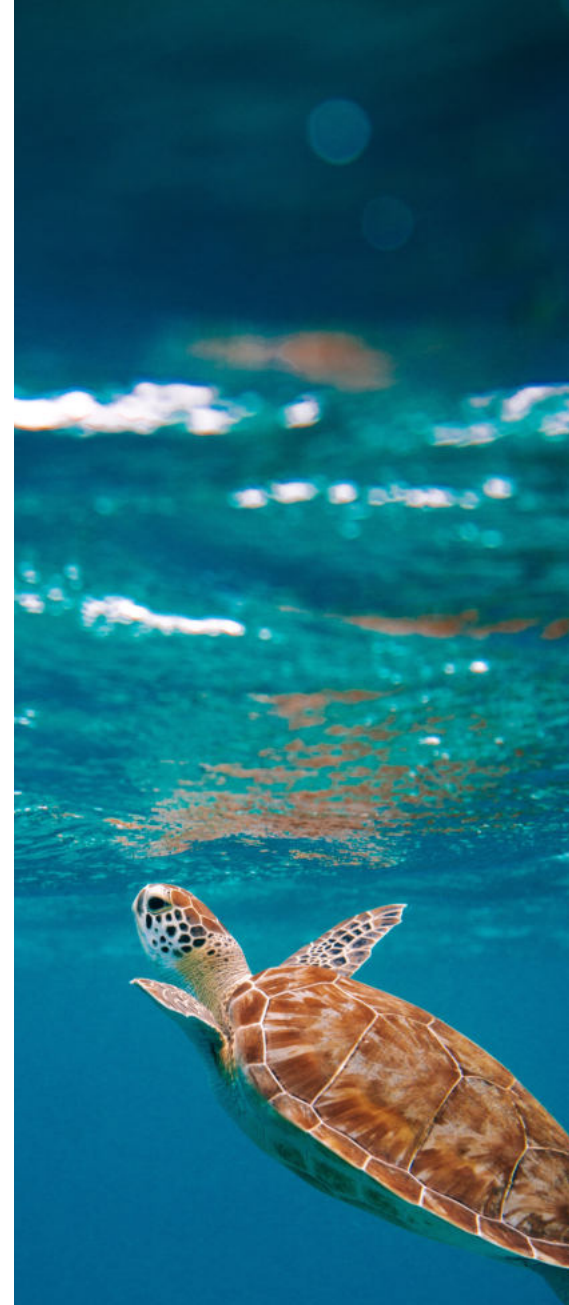
between drugs. University and research funding is set in silos. Very few researchers look at whole Earth systems and the effects of a cocktail of man-made pollutants (now called novel entities), but confine themselves to looking at the effects of one or two chemicals at a time. The Goes Foundation <https://www.goesfoundation.com/> explains the catastrophic effects such closed vision has on ocean life.

Compartmentalisation may explain why successive UK governments can favour the already wealthy when setting budgets, resulting in the largest gap between rich and poor in Europe, while maintaining the myth that money will 'trickle down' to those who need it most.

What does seem to trickle down to the rest of society is intransigence, antagonistic conduct, and concentration on consumption and financial gain.

As a group, elite people may be riddled with more severe internal conflict than the rest of us (<https://www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk/>). Duffell has said that the best way to puncture the bubble they are living in, is to seed doubt. This feels intuitively correct: I have seen doubt bring about significant changes in my own and others' views.

People and nature are allies. After detailed explanation, most people get what is happening. On Friday 9th December, a London jury found three people not guilty of causing a public nuisance by blocking a major road during the Insulate Britain campaign. The



jury got to know the people on trial and understood their reasons, and understood the importance of a government programme to properly insulate all British homes, starting with the homes of the poorest.

We need to nurture our imagination, our common humanity, our human spirit, our natural inclination to help and cooperate with each other.

We need to work with nature rather than against it. Our survival depends on healthy ecosystems. The greatest human healing comes from the natural power of our own bodies. The greatest Earth healer is the complex web of life, when allowed to recuperate in its original place.

Last week I was walking in Marian and Nick's part-wild garden, a place of beauty. I felt overwhelming sadness. The sadness had started in prison months before. I thought about the whistle blowers who continue civil resistance while the government is doing its best to stifle them. I thought about the people I know who have been in prison

for months. I thought about the continuing righteous anger they express. Maybe I needed a little anger to overcome my sadness?

No sooner thought than summoned. A heat started in my belly and spread through my body. The energy has taken me forward to write this essay.

I mentioned the experience to Marian that evening. Marian Partington is a fellow Buddhist, a Quaker, and author of the book *'If You Sit Very Still'*. Marian has done the most intensive inner work around unattended sorrow, grief, loss, and anger, and has worked with prisoners for The Forgiveness Project. Marian understood what I said and helped me to think about it. She also recommended a TED talk by Valerie Kaur: 'Three Lessons of Revolutionary Love in a Time of Rage'.

Can we think about grief and anger as our natural allies? Can we find poise between the two, akin to a state of mastery? This is what Marian called equanimity – not a passive way of being as I had previously interpreted the word, but active and energising.

My friend Jill Bird has dug deep into herself to find courage, and has taken action with Just Stop Oil. Jill's dharma teacher was the late Rob Burbea, based at Gaia House in Devon. Rob was also Mark Ovland's teacher. Through her practice, Jill aspires to master her anger and grief to use as a tool.

Energised, the lingering depression post-prison gone. During meditation my head buzzed with agitation. What emerged was the memory of the news presenter mentioning climate change the previous day. The BBC now speaks about climate change as fact, but in the tone of normality and without urgent context. Mainstream media is normalising climate change, habituating us to it, while government has given the go-ahead to new coal mining in the UK. New forms of denial.

People around the globe are looking finality in the eye. Do we wait for catastrophe to catch up with us individually, and face the final period alone? Or do we act now, together? Your choices. 🧘





Recommended listening:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001fw1l>
Rowan Williams' Reith Lecture

https://www.ted.com/talks/varalie_kaur_3_lessons_of_revolutionary_love_in_a_time_of_rage?language=en
Valerie Kaur's TED talk

Rob Burbea

<https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/?page=29> 459 talks.
No surprise that I was drawn to listen to this one first:

Rob Burbea 2011-07-31 1:10:02
1:10:02 The Meditator as Revolutionary

Gaia House: The Boundless Heart
<https://dharmaseed.org/talks/player/13850.html>

A tall, golden stupa with a face at its base, surrounded by prayer flags in a snowy mountain landscape. The stupa is covered in snow and has a golden face with blue eyes at its base. It is surrounded by many colorful prayer flags (red, orange, yellow, green, blue) that are strung across the scene. The background is a steep, snow-covered mountain under a clear blue sky.

NATURE, MINDFULNESS, ECOLOGY

The culture of harmony

By F.L. Lhündrup

The awareness of the community of Earthbound destiny
between living Nature and the human adventure
shall become a major event of our time (...).

We must recognize our biological filiation
and our ontological filiation;
It is the umbilical cord that must be re-established.

Edgar Morin*

Heaven and earth, gods and men
Are bound together by a community,
Of friendship and good understanding,
Of wisdom and the spirit of justice,
And therefore, to this universe,
They give, my friend, the name of cosmos, of arrangement,
And not the name of disturbance, nor the name of disarray.

Platon**

The mountain you see is not a mountain
The river is no different,
But a single moon cycle shines
On the mountains, the rivers and the Earth.

Wenyi***

* Edgar Morin, *Changeons de voie, les leçons du Coronavirus*, Denoël 2020

** Platon, *Gorgias*, 507 e - 508 a.

*** Wenyi (885-958): *A full load of Moonlight*, Chinese Chan Buddhist poems, trad. Mary M.Y. Fung ad David Lunde, Musical stones culture Ltd, 2014, p 57.

An intuitive Relationship

Le chemin vers l'avenir passe par le retour aux sources.

In a first approach, we understand: nature in the two senses of the term as the dynamic essence of things and as what belongs to the living; mindfulness as the natural contemplative experience and practice; ecology as the art of living in harmony with nature and the environment. The natural harmony, the spontaneous or intentional aim to preserve this harmony is their common denominator. The ties among the three could be called the “**culture of harmony**”.

There is a profound **philosophy of nature** from the earliest traditions of the native peoples, through Greco-Latin¹, Vedic and Chinese antiquity, to contemporary phenomenology². The unity in diversity of these philosophies should be a key resource for education today. In particular, the ancient Chinese philosophy masterfully establishes the continuity of outer and inner Nature and its ethic. **Ecology**,

in the sense of living in harmony with Nature, was integrated into ancient agrarian ways of life. It took on its contemporary name at the beginning of the 20th century, when it became scientific. Ecology reintroduces Nature and the Living into modernity through the notion of **ecosystem**³. As for **meditation**, mindfulness, it has the same age as humanity. Its philosophy, the contemplative science, is a philosophy of Nature in the sense that it is not dogmatic and does not rely on belief but rather on the experience and intelligence of **interdependence** from which it deduces and exposes all the metaphysical and existential implications. Its practice and its goal are the liberation of what separates us, through illusorily and painfully, from Nature.

A common source

The ties among nature, mindfulness and ecology are therefore the old story of a clear intuition. So obvious that we too often forget it. The terrifying ecological situation currently forces us to open our eyes, but we have not moved from our initial situation: homo sapiens, more correctly called **sapiens-demens** (Edgar Morin) has not changed. He walks between heaven and earth. He is born, grows old, falls ill and dies under the sun or in the moon. He understands or ignores, likes or dislikes, invents and destroys, marvels or is terrified. In the jungle of his heart and mind, in the crystalline mountains,

1. Voir notamment : Pierre Hadot, *le voile d'Isis, essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de Nature*, Folio, essais, 2008.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature*, Cours du Collège de France (1956-1960), Seuil 2021 : *It seeks to rediscover this fundamental link that unites us with nature in order to approach our senses from its own phenomenality, and not from the restricted perspective of our mental categories. See also: the [article by Claire Petitmengin](#): S'ancrer dans l'expérience vécue comme acte de résistance - Le rôle de la recherche et de la pratique micro-phénoménologiques dans les problèmes écologiques cruciaux que notre société rencontre.*

3. Edgar Morin, *écologiser l'homme*, Lemieux éditeur, 2016





the blue deserts and the fertile plains, he seeks more or less the meaning of life and always to escape suffering. He seeks to be happy like all of the living, his companions, in the wild. **Ancients or moderns**, there is no difference in depth. It is important to realize this, because our dependence on nature has not changed, meditation was relevant millennia ago as it is today, and the loss of ecological living skills is an aberration that has become lethal. In this human adventure that in the noise and fury seeks harmony, fullness and perfection, there is no other way out than to know one's mind and its nature which is also the source of all that we experience in life. Mind is therefore not a term that refers only to spiritual or philosophical experiences. By the way, the feelings of the heart and the representations of the mind are not separate. Instead of speaking of "mind" we should say "heart-mind" as the Eastern languages⁴ do. In other words, the source that commands our cognitive, emotional and physical actions is our heart-mind.

As visionary thinkers say: *The Origin lies ahead of us*⁵, *The way to the future goes by turning to the sources*⁶.

4. In Chinese *xin*, in Sanskrit *citta*, in Tibetan *sems*...the terms generally translated into western language as *mind* or *esprit* actually designate both the heart and the mind and refer to our overall cognitive and affective experience. Our human experience is both conceptual and sensitive, reasonable and affective, intellectual and emotional. Therefore, a more appropriate translation of these essential words would be *heart-mind*.

5. Martin Heidegger

6. Edgar Morin, *Leçons d'un siècle de vie*, Denoël, 2021.

Existential issues

Yet there is a chasm between the spirit and way of life of the ancients and the context and mindset of today. In the face of the apocalyptic ecological crisis, the relationships between the human experience investigated by mindfulness, nature, and ecology have become critical, to say the least. Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, recently described the ecological crisis as an **existential threat**. It raises existential questions. It raises the spectre of death and thus questions our relationship with nature, from our awareness of it to the very foundation of our modern civilization, including domestic and political life. This means that there are a thousand ways - spiritual, philosophical, poetic, scientific - of looking at what links mindfulness, nature and ecology.

The cure for an old problem

For the moment, we can consider the crucial point from which the problems and solutions unfold. This point is that of duality or the well named: **fantasy of separateness**. This old problem has continued to grow worsen until the present day. The Judeo-Christian view believed too much in seeing God outside of nature. Then, Cartesians believed it could make man the master and possessor of nature with machine animals. Today, the dominant **economic reason**, closed in on itself, has produced a predatory and destructive system which is the final stage of our separatist hallucination. The **disjunctive thinking** that separates what is



Picture provided by F.L. Lhündrup, Stupa du Dharma - Karma Ling, Buddha University – Savoie, France (Winter 2023)

inseparable and opposes what is complementary has assumed unprecedented proportions. So much so that the unity of Nature and man has become difficult to feel and to conceive. From the very beginning, mindfulness has aimed at reducing and solving the **alienation of dualism** in the relationship with oneself, others and nature. It is therefore a remedy that is as desirable as it is necessary and life-saving.

A Natural experience

The experience of mindfulness, as far as it can be put into words, is essentially a natural sensory experience and practice. [Denys Rinpoché](#) defines it as follows: "Mindfulness is first of all a state of being present in the moment, an open, attentive and empathetic sensory experience, without judgments or self-imposed mental conceptions. The present moment is experienced in its

freshness and simplicity, "as it is". This state of union with the present moment allows the most appropriate response for the situation. It is a state of well-being and freedom⁷".

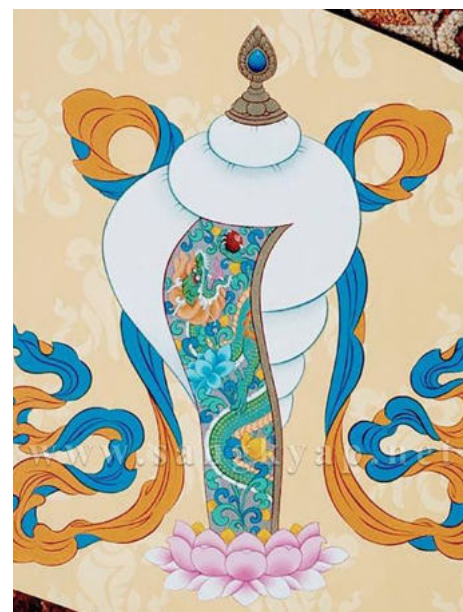
Opening the senses

Mindfulness is natural in the sense that it is not associated with a belief or ideology. But above all it is **natural** because it is not artificial, nor is it manufactured or produced by something else. It does not need an observer, let alone an external creator or legislator. On the contrary, the less you intervene the better it is. The experience of mindfulness is the state of our heart and mind embodied and lived in the **immediacy of the present**, here and now, when untouched by adventitious concepts and conditioning. This state is, like Nature: simple, rich, fertile,

7. Denys rinpoché, *Le grand livre de la Pleine présence*, Albin Michel, 2019.

luminous, intelligent, supportive, and free from the complications of the conceptual mind. It is experienced in the opening of the senses, the **naked sensoriality** and raw sensitiveness to which nature invites us. This openness is experienced in the release of the ego's grasping and in the participatory communion that nature sometimes has the gift to make us feel.

The absence of the dualistic grasping of a separate subject and object, in which the illusion of an autonomous, permanent and independent self is solidified, is the **nature of mind**, the heart of mindfulness. There are many terms for this experience. In Tibetan, for example, *rigpa* (vidya) is translated as open presence; *rangjung yéshé* (jñāna), is translated as natural primordial intelligence. This intelligence is embodied in the flesh and in the senses. It is *primary* because it is experienced in the first moment before the emergence of conceptions, before the dualistic grasping of the self. It is



Picture provided by F.L. Lhündrup, Dharma conch

experienced in the present before re-presentation. This state is innate in each of us. When it is revealed and perfectly accomplished and stable, it is the awakened state of a Buddha.

Nature unveiled

Although it is present and inherent in our Nature, this state of plenitude is veiled by the subject-object duality constitutive of the self and its painful passions. The image to illustrate this situation is that of the **sky and the clouds**. The vastness of the sky and the clarity bathed in the warm rays of the sun is the nature of our mind and the clouds are the illusions and passions that cover it. Just as the clouds do not affect the purity of the sky, the Nature of the mind is not altered by the overlaid illusions and passions. It remains hidden behind the clouds. The **path of mindfulness** is then to establish the suitable conditions of body, speech and mind, for the cloud layers to clear themselves. The

breakthroughs in the clouds and their vanishing reveal the state of the sky in its original nature, our fundamental nature, the fruit of mindfulness.

*The sky is empty and non-conceptual,
Cut the root of this conceptual Mind.
Cut the root and relax!*⁸

This process of unveiling cognitive and emotional conditioning is as natural as it is magical. It is achieved in the experience of **open presence**. This is the natural therapeutic power of unconditional presence.

Analogical Relationship

Relationships between mindfulness and nature are organic and analogical. They are organic because we are made of the elements of Nature and

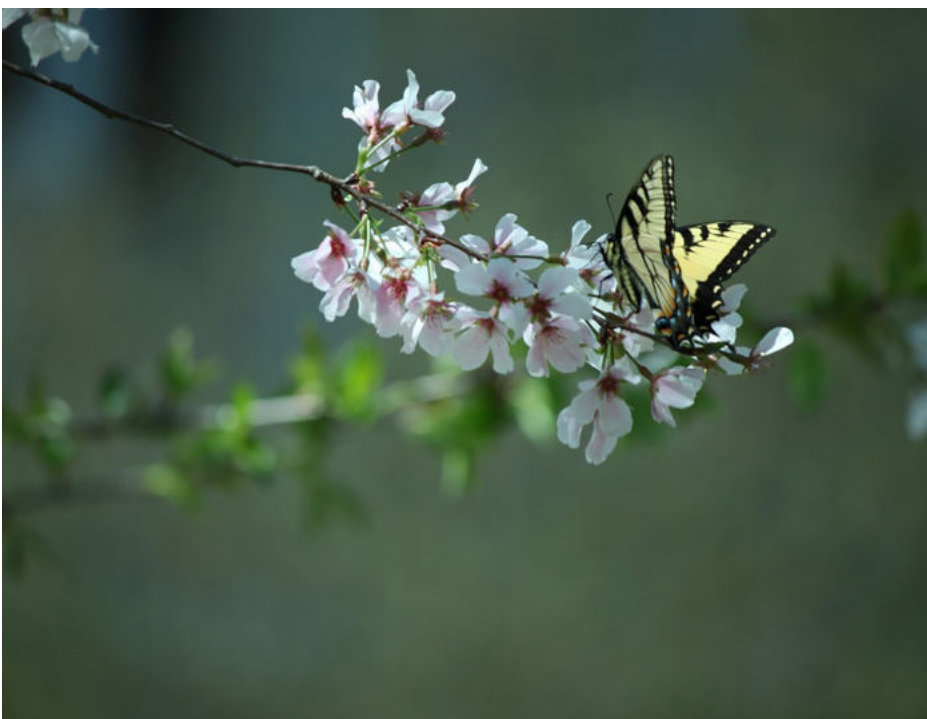
8. Sangye Tönpa, in Nicole Riggs, *Like an illusion, Lives of the Shangpa Masters, Dharma clouds*, 2001, p 9..

mindfulness does not add to what is already there. It frees us from that which separates us from Nature and our Nature.

They are analogous because there is a **continuity** between Nature and Mind. The sky is not = to the mind and clouds are not = to illusion and passions, they are analogous. There are continuities of meaning, correspondences or concordances of form or function from one level to the other. The sky is vast, luminous and unfathomable like the mind. Clouds, white or black, thick or diaphanous, appear and disappear according to the winds, like states of mind according to tendencies and events.

This logic of correspondences and symbols is the one by which we **communicate** constantly. Yet it has been marginalized by rationalist techno-scientific education in favor of linear logic, which, if solidified, is often binary, antagonistic and reductive.

The lack of analogical intelligence is a major contributor to the difficulties we have in integrating our connection to Nature in our modern world. Analogical correspondence has the advantage of building **bridges** between our human experience and that of nature. It brings the living landscape to our experience in language, thought and emotion. We **love** nature, not only because we are part of it, but also because the treasures of richness and beauty that we perceive outside are analogous to the essential qualities of our heart and mind. Nature inspires participatory



Picture provided by F.L. Lhündrup

sensations of vitality, joy, authenticity, fullness, freedom, etc. These experiences in the natural world actualize those within, in our mind. A meditation or a stay in nature can be experienced as a profound rejuvenation because both bring us closer to the source. Both can put us back in touch with that **fundamental goodness**, of which the natural order is an expression:

"The fundamental goodness is good because it is unconditional, because it is primordial. It is always already there, in the same way that heaven and earth are always here (...). There is a natural law and order that allows us to survive that is fundamentally good; it is good because it is here, because it works because it is effective"⁹.

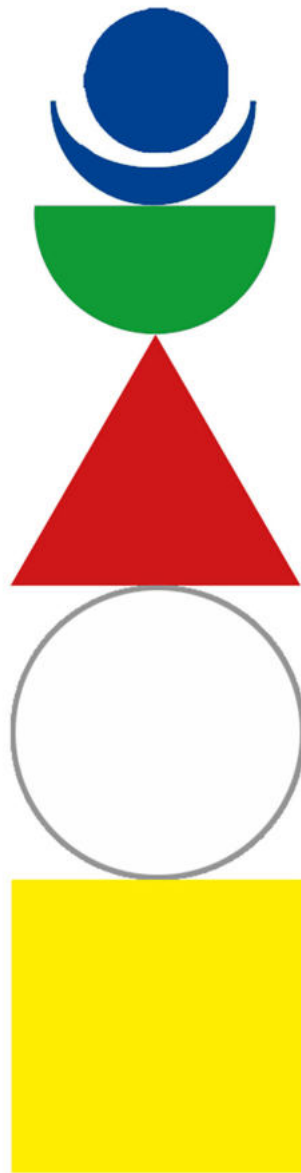
Fundamental goodness, as brilliantly exposed by the Vidyâdhara Chögyam Trungpa, is a beautiful expression of Nature's continuity and a precious inspiration for fostering confidence in contemplation. Awakening and stabilizing these qualities of Nature and its basic goodness in our experience is what mindfulness is all about.

Continuity of the five elements

«All appearances are the play of the mind in the transformations of the five elemental principles».¹⁰

9. Chögyam Trungpa, *Shambhala, The sacred path of the warrior*.

10. V. Kalu, *La Voie du Bouddha, Le Bois d'Orion*, p 108



5 elements : From earth at the bottom to space at the top
Picture provided by F.L. Lhündrup

There is a deep, even fundamental continuity between nature and mind well illustrated in the paradigm of the five elements¹¹. Earth, water, fire, air and space are constitutive of both the dwelling (Nature, the cosmos, the biosphere) and the dweller (the beings). They are the **matrix** in which the metamorphosis of the Living unfolds. More than

11. Sur la continuité des cinq éléments, voir: Kalu rinpoché, *La voie du Bouddha, Le Bois d'Orion 2018*, en anglais «Luminous Mind», Wisdom publication 1993.

things, the five elements are active **dynamic principles** present in our experience at every moment. They are present externally but also internally in our physical, psychological and spiritual structure. They form an underlying continuity to all our experiences, external and internal, from the grossest to the most subtle levels of body, energy and spirit. Well known from ancient medicines, they condition our physical, psychological and spiritual structure. Our internal and external balance depends entirely on them. Their **harmony** is a factor of physical and psychological health, while their disharmony causes natural disasters and diseases.

The solid stability of earth, the fertile and flowing wisdom of water, the warm clarity of fire, the subtle mobility of air and the openness of space have qualities present in the nature of our mind. The practice of Mindfulness helps us to feel them and to rediscover their richness, as it deconstructs the mental barriers that cut us off from our sensations and separate the outer from the inner. Mindfulness pierces the bubble of the separating ego and melts the walls that separate us from Nature. Mindfulness shows us in **sensory experience** that we are not subjects in a separate world of objects, but threads woven into the same web of interdependence, communication and solidarity.

Mountain reflects in a dragon fly's eye¹²

12. Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828)

“Mountain reflects in a dragon fly’s eye”



Picture: utsav-srestha-unsplash

We discover that our **perceptions** are in fact communications between the inside and the outside.

“Our perceptions are the product of the ongoing and dynamic communication between the organism that I am and the vast domain of which I am a part. Perception is the experience of communication between the individual microcosm and the planetary macrocosm”¹³.

The occultation of this unity and the communication that depends on it, is still one of the root causes of the ecological disaster. The experience and **practice of mindfulness** is the means par excellence to regain this unity and communion, not only in an intellectual way but in our personal experience, in our bodily sensations, our sensory perceptions and in the experience of the

13. David Abram, *Spell of the sensuous, perception and language in a more than human world*, Pantheon Books, 1996.

Nature of our heart and mind. It seems that it is from this personal transformation that real change can emerge in bringing about a new **holistic and ecological** culture. This starts with oneself, grows in small communities and could gradually give rise to new structures and institutions that respect humans and nature. This is already happening locally around the world. This culture of harmony brings to life a mental structure with concepts, references, science, philosophy, lifestyle, imagination and myths which, instead of cutting us off from our deep natural experience, connect us to it and encourage us to discover it. It is the source of a **virtuous circle** that goes from concepts to experience and from experience to concepts.

Towards a culture of Nature

There is an impulse still in human breast to unify and sanctify the total natural world – of which we are¹⁴.

This culture already exists. [European Buddhist Union](#), Dharma centers in the world, are an eminent part of it, like the one of [Buddha University](#) where I am writing this in a wild valley in the Savoyard Alps.

The Dalai Lama¹⁵ is one of the most prominent heralds of this culture of enlightenment. Its roots are nourished by the encounter between East and West. In Europe, the horror of the 14-18 war provoked a moral collapse

14. Gregory Bateson: *Mind and Nature*, Hampton Press, 2002.

15. Voir notamment la vision du Dalai lama dans son ouvrage écrit avec Sofia Stril-Rever, *Nouvelle réalité, l'âge de la responsabilité universelle*, Les Arènes 2016.



Picture provided by F.L. Lhündrup, *Sword of wisdom*

that prefigured our contemporary collapsologie. In 1919, Paul Valéry announced the "crisis of the spirit" in his famous sentence: "We now know that civilizations are mortal". The wise European intelligentsia then turned to India. René Guénon denounced the crisis of the modern world and revealed the coherence of the primordial tradition. Romain Rolland launched "L'appel de l'Orient" while his "Gandhi" had a considerable success. Some years later, Lanza del Vasto's "Pilgrimage

to the sources" indicated the path to India that will be followed by a part of the youth around the 1968 revolt, while in this same stream, the American counterculture grows with the inspiration of Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen. As early as the interwar period, the emergence of new scientific paradigms led to a holistic view of the universe that converges with ancient traditions, notably Buddhism. In the 1960s and 70s, the contemplative science

of Dharma is echoed in the new scientific interpretation of living systems as for example presented by [Fritjof Capra](#) in "The Web of Life".

In 1995, the final declaration of the Tokyo symposium organized by UNESCO, bringing together a group of great scientists from all over the world, states that:

*"Scientists have rediscovered the holistic nature of the universe... Our message is thus in line with the teachings of Mahâyâna Buddhism"*¹⁶.

These convergences were further deepened in the field of cognitive sciences with the work of [Francisco Varela](#), his seminal book, "Embodied mind" and the activities of the [Mind and life Institute](#).

The fundamental scientific research promoted by the Mind and Life Institute on the positive effects of meditation on the human mind and body, combined with the related research on the medical applications of mindfulness by John Kabat Zinn, has made meditation a scientifically validated and socially accepted practice worldwide.

These are just a few examples, to which we can add the emergence of radical [biomimetism](#) as presented by the French eco-engineer Gauthier Chapelle in "The living as a model"¹⁷ and the *philosophy of the living* explore by the French Philosopher Batiste

16. Colloque de Tokyo, *La mutation du futur*, Albin Michel, 1996.

17. [Le vivant comme modèle, pour un biomimétisme radical](#), Albin Michel, 2020.

Morizot in *"Rekindle the embers of the living"*¹⁸.

Both highlight the unity of life in contemporary terms and encourage us, as Leonardo de Vinci did, to *take our lessons from Nature* again.

From a social point of view, many experiences tend to embody this culture of harmony. In Europe, we should note the [Ecovillage](#) network and in France the remarkable rise of the [Oasis](#), ecologically resilient and socially integrated place to live.

*The awareness of our dependence on independence, i.e., the fundamental relationship with the ecosystem, leads us to reject our view of world-object and the insular man. This is the only way to understand the truth of non-Western philosophies - Asian and African - to reconcile ourselves with them and to arrive at a universal worldview.*¹⁹

Recent research

Mindfulness combined with the **contemplative science of Dharma**, if not misused, is one of the fundamental foundations of this culture of harmony. Its positive effects on the body, mind and social relationships are well known to science. Its influence on our relationship with the environment is undeniable, since it affects the source of the ecological problem, i.e., the human mind. Many studies

on the subject already exist²⁰. They are in addition to those showing how much the simple contact with nature is essential to human balance, for those who doubt it. It is interesting to note that the **beneficial effects** of immersion in nature on the brain, forest baths (*shinrin-yoku*) and other mud baths, converge, in some sense, with those of meditation, notably on stress, sleep, concentration and mental health.

20. Voir par exemple:
Dorthe Djernis , Inger Lerstrup, Dorthe Poulsen, Ulrika Stigsdotter ,Jesper Dahlgaard and Mia O'Toole: [A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Nature-Based Mindfulness: effects of Moving Mindfulness Training into an Outdoor Natural Setting](#)
Sonja M. Geiger, Siegmund Otto, and Ulf Schrader, *Mindfully Green and Healthy: Mindfully Green and Healthy: An Indirect Path from Mindfulness to Ecological Behavior*
Travis N. Ray, Nicole Jarret, Scott A Franz, Scott M Picket: [Nature Enhanced Meditation: Effects on Mindfulness, Connectedness to Nature, and Pro- Environmental](#)
Jian Wang, Liuna Geng, P. Wesley Schultz, and Kexin Zhou: [Mindfulness Increases the Belief in Climate Change: The Mediating Role of Connectedness with Nature.](#)

The virtues of marriage

To conclude, we can say that Nature in its different aspects and mindfulness practice enrich and **fertilize each other**.

On the one hand, mindfulness meditation is beneficial to the environment through its influence on our state of mind, our mentality and therefore on our way of life. On the other hand, contact with nature orients our mind toward its essential roots, inspires and strengthens mental, psychological and physical health.

Moreover, their association remedies **two pitfalls** that threaten us: an illusory technological ecology and a superficial mindfulness, both of which are bogged down if not recuperated by techno-scientific materialism and consumerism.

The first pitfall is the one faced by the standard ecology. Puzzle with existential questions, it is insufficient and powerless. The second



18. Baptiste Morizot, *Raviver les braises du vivant*, Actes Sud, 2020.

19. Edgar Morin, *L'an I de l'ère écologique*, Taillandier 2007.

pitfall concerns the worldwide development of mindfulness which, if reduced to a quest for cosmetic 'well-being', would lose its meaning in the shadow of a soon-to-be unlivable planet.

Questioned by the first hurdle, ecology can reconnect with the role of mind in our relation to environmental issues and acknowledge the unity of Nature and interdependence already well highlighted by systemic sciences. It is only a short step from there to drawing all the spiritual and material consequences of interdependence and the right way to live within.

Faced with the second pitfall, contemporary mindfulness practice, by opening up to Nature and ecology, could more explicitly integrate the teaching on interdependence and reintroduce the Nature of mind into its horizon, if it had ever been lost. Meditation, properly understood, would then be the source of a spirituality and ethics of Nature.

In short, the marriage of mind and ecology gives rise to an approach to meditation that is resourced in Nature in both senses of the term, and to an ecology that adds to the outer Transition a concrete and accessible means for everyone to participate in the necessary inner Transition based on personal transformation. 🧘

F.L. Lhündrup
lhundroup@rimay.net
[Buddha University](#)
France



Picture provided by F.L. Lhündrup

*For an
auspicious
year oh the
rabbit*





Save the Date

21 - 24

September 2023

in Brussels

EBU AGM

hosted by the

Soka Gakkai International Center

(www.sgi-bel.org/en/contact)

**"Making a Difference":
a NEW Buddhist voice in Brussels**

Special sessions on:

Friday, 22 September

with European Institution delegates –
for members only

Sunday, 24 September

with Inner EcoDharma guests –
open to the public



COLOFON

Final Editing:

Ron Eichhorn
Stefano Davide Bettera
Emilia Amalā Raunio

Graphic Design:

Noemi Carmona Laan
www.numydesigns.com

Contact the EBU

www.europeanbuddhistunion.org
info@europeanbuddhistunion.org

 EuropeanBuddhistUnion

The EBU was founded in 1975 in London and is a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders and Religions for Peace.

In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe.



The EBU appreciates your
interest in our magazine.



Picture: kim-ick-unsplash