Ajahn Amaro

A Currency of Well-being

A Currency of Well-being

‘Helping 12 faiths make long term plans to protect the planet’

Ajahn Amaro

The need to have a corrective to the broad assumptions (usually unexamined) of how an economy works has become a real issue for us.'

Martin Palmer, 1-2-18

This article was written at the request of Martin Palmer, an old friend of this community and the founder and Secretary General of the Alliance for Religion and Conservation, an organization whose chief patron is HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

The ARC recently launched a project, 'The Faith Consistent Investment Alliance' (now known as 'FaithInvest'), to encourage the financial arms of the major world religions to use their resources to support environmentally sound and sustainable enterprises. Amaravati Buddhist Monastery was invited to contribute to the discussions and this article was written and submitted to them in the spring of 2018. It was used as a discussion item at a UN meeting in New York, in March of this year.

Following that event Martin Palmer wrote: 'The Faith Consistent Investment Alliance (FCIA) is on track and moving with quite extraordinary energy. The meeting ... was held in New York and was co-hosted by ARC and UNDP at the UN. We invited a range of faith representatives to meet with us and the UN and with supporting philanthropies to agree a set of targets for the formal establishment by April next year at the latest of the FCIA as an independent organisation. It was highly successful not least because of your paper.

1 – ‘If You Make Good Soup…’ – Buddhist Traditions of Mendicancy

‘I haven’t used money since 1978’ is the usual response I make when asked about the Buddhist monastic lifestyle. It invariable brings a moment’s pause in the conversation, if not a wide-eyed dropping of jaws. It’s a very different way to live, never owning or even handling money of any kind, and describing it usually brings forth such questions as: ‘How can one possibly live that way, especially in the modern world?’ And ‘How could such a lifestyle be of relevance to the global population and the well-being of the world?’

At the very start of the Buddha’s teaching career, about 2,600 years ago, he established the practice of mendicancy for himself and his monastic disciples, the Sangha. This means that the small proportion of his followers who wished to commit to a celibate renunciant life-style, in order to focus fully on meditation and spiritual disciplines, made a commitment to rely completely on the generosity of the much larger community of householder disciples for all their material needs – food, clothing, shelter and medicines. The members of the Sangha, then and now, are prohibited from ever owning or using money. It is a deliberate assumption of material dependency; one that is formed in order to create a symbiotic relationship whereby both dimensions of the community, monastic and lay, and consequently the whole society, are enriched.

In countries like Thailand the daily morning alms-round is the archetypal interaction between the Buddhist monastic and lay communities. The monastics walk barefoot, quietly in a line with their empty alms-bowls and those of the lay community who are inclined to offer something that day wait by the side of the road. Some food is placed in the bowl, and the line moves on. In this exchange, even at the most superficial level, the lay person is reminded of spiritual values and is uplifted by the joy that comes from offering assistance freely, while the physical needs of the monastic community are provided for that day.

The monks and nuns walk with downcast eyes and can never ask for anything; they do not intrude into anyone’s personal space but are available for offerings. Interestingly enough the discipline laid down by

the Buddha all those centuries ago, requiring a non-intrusive quiet presence, was described by a British barrister as 'Driving a line straight through the 1824 Vagrancy Act…'. The alms-round is thus not a form of begging but rather a conscious participation in what has been called 'the economy of gifts'.

The custom of going on alms-round, as well as making long-distance walks through the country (a practice known as *tudong*), does not only occur in Asia but is followed in Western countries as well. Groups of nuns or monks have walked many hundreds of miles in the UK, Ireland, in the USA, New Zealand and on the continent of Europe. During these times the monastics are usually provided for by random strangers, rather than by regular monastery supporters, whether it's on a morning walk to the nearest village or on a long- distance hike. Often the first thing a passer-by will do is to offer some cash.

The conversation then goes something like this:

> 'Sorry, we can't accept money.'
> 'Is there anything I *can* give you?'
> 'If you have some food, you could offer some of that if you'd like…'.

It might be surprising to hear that wandering Buddhist monastics can travel hundreds of miles in Western countries and be sustained by those who have never met them before – often by those who know little or nothing of Buddhism. One might think that a more systematized network of provision would be needed. Back in the early 1970s Ajahn Chah, the abbot of our main monastery in Thailand, asked his most senior Western student, Ajahn Sumedho, 'Do you think you will ever go back to the West and start a monastery there?'

Ajahn Sumedho was surprised by the question. He replied, 'How could I do that? How could one live as a monk in a non-Buddhist country?'

Ajahn Chah immediately responded, 'Do you mean to say that there are no kind people in America?'

It was at that point that Ajahn Sumedho realized that he would indeed be going back to the West one day, and, in 1977, that's exactly what occurred, seeding the foundation of more than 30 monasteries of this community outside of Thailand.

The wise perspective that Ajahn Chah articulated here is significant,

especially when considering our place in society as a whole. He is saying that kindness is a universal human quality and transcends religious boundaries; we are all ‘sisters and brothers in birth, ageing, sickness and death’ and thus we participate in a relatedness that comes from our common humanity, physical, mental and spiritual. For example, monks from our community on long *tudong* walks in India have often found that the most heartfelt support and appreciation for their presence has been found when going for alms in Muslim villages.

In a similar vein, once Ajahn Sumedho had arrived in London and was getting acquainted with life in the West, in 1977, he asked Ajahn Chah if they should advertise the monastery, put up notices about their talks and events in Hampstead Public Library or even on the Underground. Ajahn Chah smiled, shook his head and said, ‘If you make good soup, people will get to hear about it.’ That is to say, if what you embody and offer to the world is of benefit, then people will show up.

2 – Rugged Interdependency

The driving force for this process is how the monastic community lives and what the values are that it exemplifies – ‘Is the soup good?’ in other words. If the most noble human qualities are being practised and expounded – such as unselfishness, simplicity, harmlessness, honesty, sense-restraint, generosity, mindfulness and wisdom – that is the fuel for this economy of gifts, and its currency is the well-being of all. People draw close to help, and not only does the helping bring joy but it provides access for those individuals to practical advice for mental and physical well-being; in turn, for the monastic community, there is a joy in being able to help others with their mental and social struggles, and an appreciation of the kindness that provides physical sustenance each day. The main value of adherence to the monastic Rule (*Vinaya*) is to sustain the well-being of the ‘ecosystem’. It keeps the symbiotic contrast between the two parts of the Buddhist community alive (like the balance of clownfish and anemones in a coral reef), and therefore sustains the vitality of the system.

This kind of economy is not confined to a daily alms-round, it also informs the way that monasteries are run as a whole. For example, our group of monasteries has a ‘no fundraising’ policy. The lay stewards (who are responsible for tending the funds offered to maintain monastery buildings and to cover medical, travel and construction expenses etc.) never ask anyone for financial or other donations. If there is a project underway, such as the construction of a meditation hall, or the replacement of inefficient and hard-to-maintain buildings, the stewards will let it be known that the project is mooted but no one will be approached for a donation. Like the quiet robed figure on the roadside, with eyes downcast, the monastery is available for offerings but not hassling anyone.

Again it might be surprising but the running costs of Amaravati Monastery, which are approximately £1000 per day at present, are all covered by such free-will donations, mostly from a large pool of small contributors. The long- term plan that we have to replace the 79-year-old wooden huts that currently form most of the monastery – some 8000 square metres of buildings – has an estimated cost of ~ £30,000,000. Accordingly we plan for all of that to come from freely offered funds rather than any asks.

This kind of conscious, deliberate dependency reminds us as human beings that we live in a relational state, that we need each other, and that so-called ‘independence’ is largely an illusion; if our oxygen supply is cut of for five minutes, for example, we are dead. It is agreed that this rejoicing in mutual dependency might seem to fly in the face of concepts such as ‘the Protestant work ethic’ and ‘rugged individualism’ but it might be most helpful to see that this economy of gifts represents instead a ‘rugged interdependency’. Instead of resenting the need to rely on others and taking it as a weakness or a state of deprivation, one can regard it as a way of respecting and rejoicing in the relatedness that all beings have with each other and with the ecosystem of the world. It is a radical unselfishness on both sides.

The economy of gifts is thus a win/win arrangement rather than being a mercenary or parasitical system, with one group merely manoeuvring to see what they can get out of the other. Instead, in its healthiest manifestations, it is a symbiotic, mutualistic relationship, a reciprocal altruism, a long-term relationship between partners where both groups, and the whole ecosystem benefits.

3 – ‘What Is Money For?’ – Well-Being as a Virtual Currency

The religious and spiritual traditions alive in the world today are many and various. The Buddhist customs and practices of monasticism and mendicancy are only one model amongst many of how a community can live and work to bring forth its most worthy qualities, to use an economy of gifts to generate and support well-being. The dynamic found in this Buddhist tradition is only one way of sustaining such a fertile chemistry and it has been described here in order to serve as a single example. Such economies of giving can be cultivated equally fruitfully in a great variety of human relations and institutions, for example between teachers and students, parents and children, individual and community… It is a principle independent of religion and culture.

In the classical Buddhist expression of the lay/monastic relationship it is said that ‘the lay community provides material support for the monastics and the monastics, in turn, provide spiritual support for the lay community’. In this expression it seems as though the lay community’s offerings are tangible, and have an economic value, whilst the monastic offerings are intangible and have no economic value; they are ‘non-bankable, social returns’, as it has been described. However, there are other ways that the issue can be regarded which make the picture more nuanced, particularly if we consider well-being as a virtual currency, one that flows in both directions. The blessings flow both ways between the polar partners in the symbiosis. Well-being – material and non-material – is supported on both sides, just as with parents helping their children and children, in turn, helping their parents as occurs in most societies around the world.

As a counterpoint to the spiritual support that the monastic community provides for the lay, the monastic community also receives spiritual benefit from its interactions with the laity. To use Ajahn Chah as an example once again, he once commented that, ‘I developed far more wisdom sitting and receiving people non-stop for 25 years, and helping them deal with their problems, that I ever did sitting meditating in the wilds of the forest on my youthful travels.’

To give another example of the two-way nature of such relationships,

here is a description of one more such instance, again from the Buddhist domain. Although it was said that the monastics provide spiritual support to the public, it can be said that there are material, 'bankable' returns that come to the lay community from their interaction with monastics as well, particularly through the provision of guidance in meditation. Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), stated in a keynote speech at a conference entitled *'Mindfulness and the Dharma'*, at Sapienza University in Rome, 2013, that depression was the cause of approximately double the number of lost work days, worldwide, than any other illness, or injury. It is a public health issue with a huge economic impact. (Poor mental health at work costs the UK economy between £74 billion and £99 billion per year, according to a government commissioned review published recently.) He then went on to speak about the use of mindfulness meditation in order to counteract depression.

He described how, up until 2007, if a person had experienced recurrent periods of depression (i.e. more than an isolated episode) there was a 90%- 95% chance that it would recur. No treatment over the previous century had provided more than a 10% chance of recovery – not counselling, medication, psychoanalysis, surgery... Only one in ten had a hope of a complete remission of the disease. Then in 2007 a study was carried out in the UK by Mark Williams (Oxford University), John Teasdale (Cambridge University) and Zindel Segal (University of Toronto), using a technique they called 'Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression' (MBCT). This was a method involving the patients working with their thoughts with two key principles in mind:

1. Your thoughts are not completely true.
2. Your thoughts are not who and what you are in any fundamental way.

Coincidentally, it was hearing these points being made in a talk by Ajahn Sumedho that caused John Teasdale to establish these as a basis for MBCT.

The group discovered that they had a 50% cure rate, using this method. There was some disbelief concerning this figure in the scientific community; a result that demonstrated itself to be 500% more effective than any other treatment was deemed highly unlikely. They carried out the same study on a completely different sample

group, in the USA this time, and achieved the same results. This is when interest in mindfulness began to skyrocket around the world.

At the present time mental health issues have reached epidemic proportions in the West, particularly amongst young people. For example, an article in The Daily Telegraph (1-12-2017) stated:

> The number of young children seeing psychiatrists has risen by a third amid an 'epidemic of anxiety' official figures show.
>
> A new report shows soaring numbers of children receiving psychiatric treatment – with a 31 per cent rise in one year among those aged nine and under.
>
> Experts said children were struggling to cope with mounting levels of anxiety, bullying and depression, fuelled by social media.
>
> The analysis by the Children's Commissioner comes as the Government prepares to publish a green paper on children's mental health. Ministers are expected to say therapists should be sent into schools, to deal with a rising tide of anxiety. Every school will be told to have a designated teacher in charge of mental health, with new targets to cut NHS waiting times.
>
> Earlier this year a study by University College London found one in four teenage girls reported symptoms of depression. The research which tracked more than 10,000 children found widespread evidence of emotional problems, with misery, loneliness and self-hate rife.

This is just a snapshot of one sector of one country's mental well-being. Most readers will be well-aware that this issue extrapolates across many populations, old and young, over many countries of the world, if not the majority of them. This stark reality then leads to the questions:

> 'What is our material wealth really worth, if this degree of mental instability and lack of well-being is so rife?'
>
> 'What is money for if individuals are in such states of misery?' 'Material security is one dimension of our lives but what is it worth if the mind is locked in despair?'
>
> Money really cannot buy us love…

4 – Gross National Happiness & Value-based Education

If we took the step to refocus our priorities, making the cultivation of well- being our prime objective rather than the size of the Gross National Product, it could bring a substantial balm to the system. If we took well-being as our virtual currency – in schools, in the workplace, in the home and in our spiritual institutions, irrespective of our faith or political allegiance – it could radically revise the way we live and how we relate to the world and its resources.

In 2008 the government of Bhutan instituted ‘Gross National Happiness’ as the goal of the country in its Constitution. In 2011, The UN General Assembly urged member nations to follow the example of Bhutan and measure happiness and well-being, and designated happiness as a ‘Fundamental human goal’. In 2012, Bhutan's Prime Minister, Jigme Thinley, and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, convened a high level meeting: *‘Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm’* to encourage the spread of Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness philosophy.

Bhutan is a small kingdom, with a population of less than a million people, however the example that it gives in prioritizing well-being is a very timely example for the world. It is notable that the United Nations have given the principle of GNH some prominence and support. G8 countries such as Canada and France have participated in past international conferences on GNH. Of the 2012 UN conference, The Guardian (2-4-2012) remarked:

> A UN meeting today is discussing happiness, which doesn’t come in dollar bills but – says a report – from strong social networks, employment, health, political freedom and the absence of corruption. And one of the world’s tiniest nations is setting an example.

It is not possible to simply pass laws to change people’s attitudes and value systems, there has to be a transformation of perspective in each individual. To bring about such a refocusing of priorities the most fruitful place to start is with the young. Therefore, when considering a shift to an economy of gifts and a currency of well-being, the best place

to start is probably within domain of education.

One of the biggest strains upon the young is the push for academic achievement yet there is a visceral emotional stress that comes with success being measured only by exam scores. There is an arms-race of achievement between schools, continually fuelled by the promise of prestigious placement at the next educational stratum. Meanwhile the incidences of self-harming, panic attacks, suicide attempts and the need for psychiatric treatment, even for the under-nines, continue to escalate.

In contrast, some schools now focus more on 'emotional intelligence', arising from a value-based education, rather than making academic excellence the one and only measure of success in the educational process. Yodphet Sudsawad, one of the head teachers at Panyaden International School, Chiang Mai, Thailand, gave a significant talk on this subject at an educational conference, (the International and Private Schools Education Forum, Middle East 2017 Conference, in Dubai), entitled: '*Academic Excellence as a By-product of Value-Based Education*'. In it she began by stating:

Conventional education that focuses on academic excellence is like the fossil fueled car. There is still a commercial market for it but in terms of scientific content and answering the consumer's needs it is outdated. The expiry date is clearly visible.

She then proceeded to itemize the 'Twelve Wise Habits' that form the basis of their curriculum.

1. Using the senses wisely *(Indriyasamvāra)*
2. Knowing the right amount *(Mattaññutā)*
3. Not harming *(Avihimsa)*
4. Being patient and tolerant *(Khanti)*
5. Being enthusiastic *(Chanda)*
6. Being truthful *(Sacca)*
7. Persevering *(Viriya)*
8. Being generous *(Cāga)*
9. Being kind and compassionate *(Mettā Karunā)*
10. Being mindful and alert *(Sati)*
11. Being calm and focused *(Samādhi)*
12. Applying the mind skilfully *(Yonisomanasikāra)*

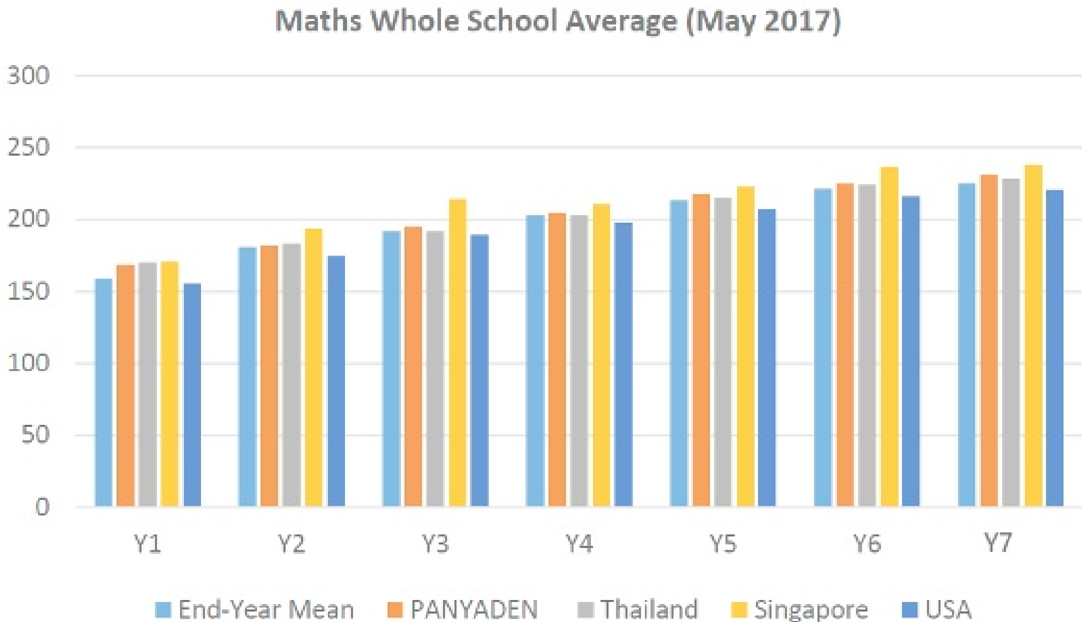
On the viability of this approach she said:

‘For example, we have a program called “my project” where kids set up their own projects, something they want to do. So they are enthusiastic about it. Along the process difficulties will arise, but they need to stick to it without asking adults to “fix” it for them. There will be times when they get lazy and want to give up. These are the important moments. For us these are the opportunities for real personal development.

‘And we can show that our theory of “wise habits resulting in academic achievement” automatically actually works.

‘...[T]he MAP test reading results that show that if you let children develop at their own speed they will inhale the knowledge if the environment is stimulating and they feel no pressure.

‘So in the beginning our curve looks a bit slower than the others as we are working on the right foundations. But then you can see already in year 5 and 6 we are above most of the others. And now you can imagine what the curve will be in year 12 and 13, we don't have those data yet because we are not open to that age, but the continuation of the curve is obvious.’



The 'Thailand' data in the graph refers to international schools in Thailand.

Her school has a small number of pupils (221 in 2018), and was

therefore something of a minor player amongst the large and prestigious schools and educational corporations gathered at the event. She was consequently surprised that, after her talk, she was inundated with requests for more information, invitations to speak at other events and requests to help establish similar programs at other schools around the world. There was a hunger for this approach centred around the well-being of the pupil, completely irrespective of whether those other schools were from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist or secular backgrounds. The heartful engagement, from the side of both the pupils and the teachers, supports the whole system's well-being.

In a similar vein, ever since Amaravati Monastery was founded in 1984 it has incorporated a variety of programs for families, as well as providing almost daily pastoral counselling with parents and children relating to a wide variety of issues. These programs include such as a 10-day Family Summer Camp, week-ends dedicated to creativity and to the support of Buddhist teenagers, and a 'Young Persons' Retreat. The principles of the above mentioned Wise Habits, as well as the broader range of Buddhist teachings and practices, form the basis of these events and interactions.

The understanding behind all these offerings of the Monastery is that the imparting of Buddhist principles should not be confined to describing stories from the life of the Buddha, or in imparting only intellectual knowledge of the scriptures. Rather it is in the life lessons that can be learned – how the well- being of the children and indeed the whole family can be enhanced – that the real value of the instructional contact between the lay and monastic community is measured.

In 1994, ten years after Amaravati was founded, a number of the families that had been deeply involved in the Summer Camp and other children's programs took the initiative to start a small school in Brighton, UK, now called the Dharma Primary School. This has been steadily developing over the years as an institution based on principles very similar to Panyaden International School, offering 'an education based on Buddhist values'.

It is noteworthy that, in 2017, the Dharma Primary School was the winner of the Independent Schools Association (ISA) award for 'Excellence & innovation in pupils' mental health & wellbeing'. This

was a significant recognition as the ISA has several hundred member schools, both senior and junior. Furthermore it underscores the fact that, like influence of Bhutan in the UN in the realm of well-being, a small junior school has been held up as an example for other bigger, more prestigious and longer-established institutions to pay attention to.

5 – Well-being as a Universal Possibility – the ‘Gift of Fearlessness’ and Resilience Brokerages

Even though we have drawn in this essay chiefly upon examples from the Buddhist sphere, hopefully it can be seen that the currency of well-being is exchangeable and valid in all countries and in the hands of those of all faiths, or no faith. Similarly, it is likely that those Twelve Wise Habits are equally vaunted as noble human qualities in almost every society around the globe. These principles apply outside the Buddhist sphere and can inform all faiths, in a skilful and beneficial way.

The word ‘Economy’ comes from the Greek *oîkos* = house + *némō* = distribute/allocate; it therefore literally means ‘management of a household’. All people can participate in this ‘economy’ this ‘caring for the house’, which is a caring for the ecosystem of the living world, beyond our religious and national boundaries.

Each faith has its own conventions, for instance regarding food, the sanctity of life, the appropriate management of money and so forth. The specific protocols we each follow dictates the exact way in which we choose to ‘care for the house’ – it will vary if we are a Catholic or a Lutheran; a Northern or a Southern Buddhist; an Orthodox or a Reform Jew; a Suni or a Shiite Muslim; a Shaivite or a Vaishnavite Hindu; a skeptical materialist or a logical positivist... Nevertheless, if we focus on the root principles of wholesomeness and make the cultivation of well-being our priority, we can care for the house of our world whilst respecting and cooperating with the values of our fellow housekeepers.

We are all in this life together; birth, old age, sickness and death are a common currency too. These are human, trans-religious experiences. One of the great blessings of using the economy of gifts, this kind of reciprocal altruism, as a framework for functioning in the world is that such participation leads to being nourished and supported by a field of benevolence and cooperation. By generating wholesomeness we experience the well-wishing and appreciation of others that naturally comes from that – like a fertile field, this is source of psychological

nourishment and contentment for us. In Buddhist tradition this is called a 'field of blessings', *puññakhetta*.

The Twelve Wise Habits are all qualities conducive to the boosting of this economy. In addition the Buddha highlighted the fact that the habits relating to our behaviour are particularly significant. When we are respectful, honest and well-restrained, it is a gift both for others and ourselves:

> 'Now, there are these five gifts, five great gifts – original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated from the beginning – that are not open to suspicion and are unfaulted by knowledgeable wise people. What five?
>
> 'If one abstains from (1) taking life, in so doing one gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In so doing one in turn enjoys limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity and freedom from oppression oneself. This is the first great gift.
>
> 'If one abstains from (2) stealing … (3) sexual misconduct … (4) lying … (5) using intoxicants, in so doing one gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In so doing, one in turn enjoys limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression oneself. These are the second, third, fourth and fifth great gifts.
>
> 'These great gifts are the reward of creating blessings, the reward of skilfulness; they are the nourishment of happiness, resulting in happiness; they lead to heavenly states, to what is desirable, pleasurable and appealing; they lead to welfare and to happiness.' (Anguttara Nikāya 8.39)

In addition to skilful behaviour being a contributing factor to a healthy economy of gifts and its resultant well-being, as mentioned above in relation to MBCT and depression the practices of meditation and mindfulness are a highly significant influence as well.

Today specialization in teaching meditation, mindfulness and related sources of mental of well-being is not confined to monasteries, far from it. In the West these are a small minority when compared to the great many retreat centres and mindfulness training programs

available outside a monastic environment. There are Buddhist meditation retreat centres such as Gaia House, in Devon, Insight Meditation Society, in Massachusetts, and a long list of others. The resources are manifold, both for face-to-face instruction as well as online courses and Apps for smart-phones. In addition, just within the UK and the USA, there are numerous degree courses that provide meditation training and academic study of the field; for example at Bangor University, Exeter University, Oxford Mindfulness Centre, University of California Berkeley 'Greater Good Science Center', University of California Los Angeles 'Mindful Awareness Research Center', Center for Mindfulness University of Massachusetts Medical School and others.

The Ecological Sequestration Trust is an organization dedicated to global sustainable development; Prof. Peter Head is its founder and Chief Executive Officer. In September 2017, this Trust organized a gathering under the heading of: *'Resilience Brokers – Approaching Programme Implementation'*. This event brought together leading experts from partner organizations who completed detailed development plans and agreed to a 'Declaration of Commitment' to go forward together as 'Resilience Brokers'.

The aim of this Commitment is to initiate 'new ways of thinking and co- creating driven by the power of collaboration and the networked strengths of an outstanding group of individuals and organizations, working towards a common goal: the rapid transition to resilient development paths in all regions of the world, to set them on track to achieving the Global Goals and Paris Agreement targets.' Such Resilience Brokers would be able to 'provide communities with the tools and support they need to become resilient and able to withstand all emerging global challenges, and a chance to look forward to a better future: a future built on equality, justice, dignity, respect and shared prosperity for all.'

Although the term 'Resilience Brokers' has been coined and used by the Ecological Sequestration Trust to refer to a specific group of organizations, committed to realizing sustainable development goals on a material level, I would suggest that the mindfulness-based university and online courses, meditation centres and monasteries mentioned above can be considered equally as 'resilience brokerages'. Their purpose is to provide the means whereby the well-being of each individual can be maximized, and to state the goal of a meditation

centre, a mindfulness training course or a monastery as to: ‘provide communities with the tools and support they need to become resilient and able to withstand all emerging global challenges, and a chance to look forward to a better future…’ would be very close to the mark as a mission statement for most such bodies.

Such resources, of guidance in meditation and mindfulness practices, are available to the broader community and are not faith-specific in their availability or applicability – just as the meditation classes and retreats at Amaravati are designed to cater for all faiths and do not presume either that the participants are Buddhists or wish to become Buddhists. As such these meditation and mindfulness practices aim to provide the resources that help all those who are interested to be effective and cooperative housekeepers in caring for this house – this, our unique and precious planet. Our preoccupation with money-base economies is outmoded; like the fossil fueled vehicle and conventional education – ‘There is still a commercial market for it but … it is outdated. The expiry date is clearly visible.’

What is money for if not to support the well-being of the planet as a whole? When we endeavour to work with others it is easy to clash or compete, to become disheartened, frustrated or just exhausted … this is natural. If, however, the mind has been fortified with some of the spiritual strengths mentioned here there will be a resilience, a robust adaptability. That in turn will nourish the various types of reciprocal altruism wherein we all benefit by helping each other, resulting in an abundance of the riches of well-being. That abundance is a more powerful source of benefit than any amount of financial aid for it enables us to find a place of cooperation and respect that is the mother lode of goodness. And that is what will enable this planet not just to survive but to fully thrive.

Ajahn Amaro
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
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