

Buddha-Nature, Human Nature Ajahn Sucitto

THE ENTIRE COSMOS IS A COOPERATIVE. THE SUN, THE MOON, AND THE STARS LIVE TOGETHER AS A COOPERATIVE. THE SAME IS TRUE FOR HUMANS AND ANIMALS, TREES, AND THE EARTH. WHEN WE REALIZE THAT THE WORLD IS A MUTUAL, INTERDEPENDENT, COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE – THEN WE CAN BUILD A NOBLE ENVIRONMENT. IF OUR LIVES ARE NOT BASED ON THIS TRUTH, THEN WE SHALL PERISH.¹

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU

HUMAN BEINGS AND THE NATURAL WORLD ARE ON A COLLISION COURSE. HUMAN ACTIVITIES INFLICT HARSH AND OFTEN IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ON CRITICAL RESOURCES. IF NOT CHECKED, MANY OF OUR CURRENT PRACTICES PUT AT SERIOUS RISK THE FUTURE THAT WE WISH FOR HUMAN SOCIETY ... AND MAY SO ALTER THE LIVING WORLD THAT IT WILL BE UNABLE TO SUSTAIN LIFE IN THE MANNER THAT WE KNOW. FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES ARE URGENT IF WE ARE TO AVOID THE COLLISION OUR PRESENT COURSE WILL BRING ABOUT.²

UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS 1993





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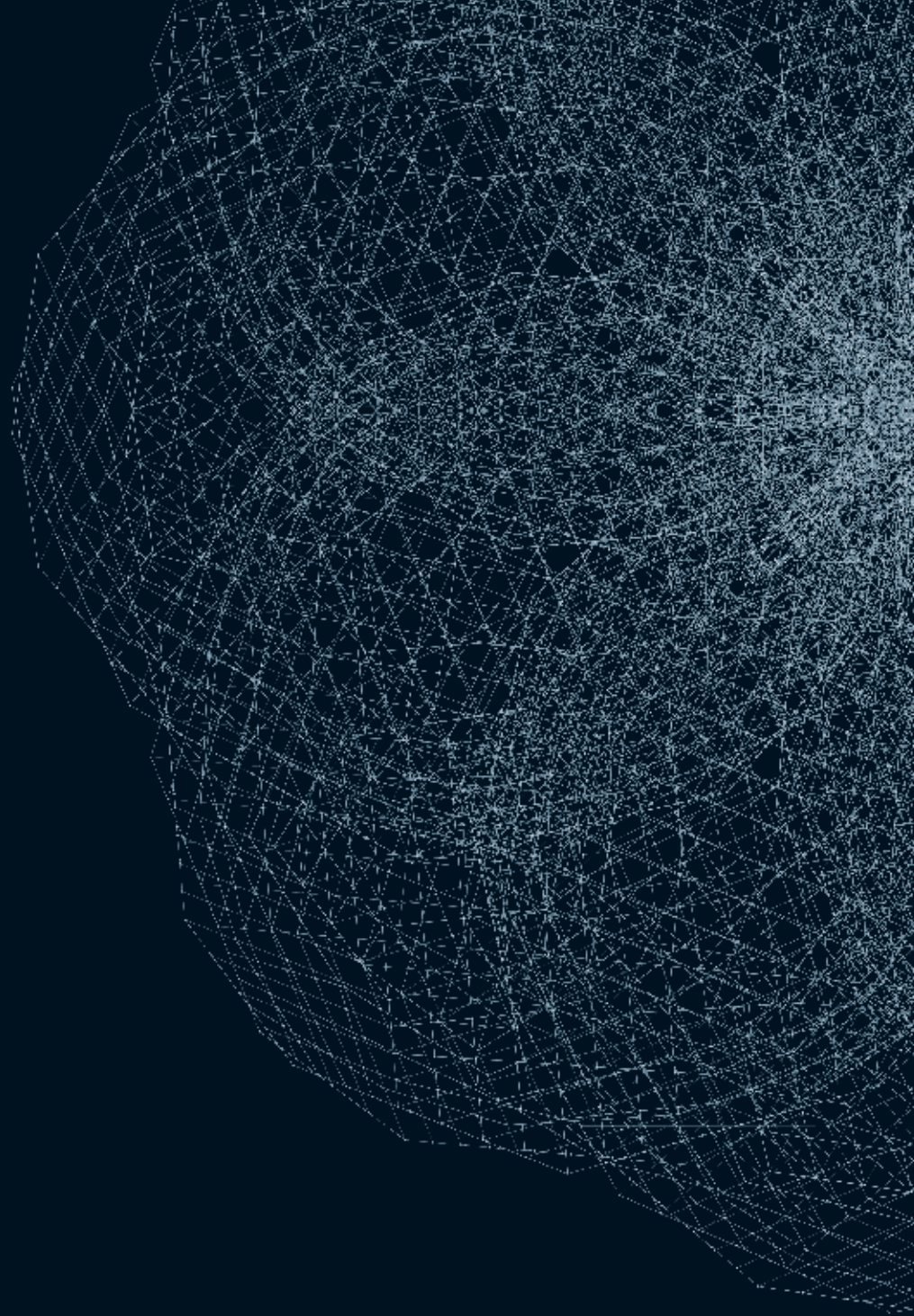
*Buddha-Nature,
Human Nature*

AJAHN SUCITTO



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Preface

Buddha-Nature, Human Nature is a book about our environment and the effects that Buddhism has had and can have upon it. The idea of writing such a book was initiated by attending a Vipassana Teachers' Conference in 2013 at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. Included in that conference was a stirring presentation about climate change and its current and predicted effects; we teachers were then left with the question: given that you are in a position to address others, is there anything you can do to bring awareness of this impending catastrophe to your students? Is there any way that you could contribute towards giving people of the future the benefit of a healthy environment? A number of us made commitments to teach in terms that would encourage extending ethical responsibility to include the Earth. I also decided that writing a book on the topic would offer greater outreach. I had previously touched into environmental topics in 1989 with the booklet *Buddha-Nature* – which I had produced for the Interfaith Gathering on Religion and the Environment at Canterbury, England. So at first what seemed to be needed was an update of that material. In fact, it has entailed much more, as even the limited research that I have undertaken revealed a world-view that both supports escalating environmental destruction and seems impervious to the global protests and scientific evidence mounted against it.

I have attempted to use a 'scientific' method: to refer to data from a range of sources over a period of time, look at the results and deduce a conclusion. Of course all statistics are open to interpretation and

the specific details change with time; but when a mass of them from different sources, each adopting a scientific method, arrives at the same conclusion, it would be hard not to take them seriously. And when such statistics are challenged by those with invested interests, it suggests a bias. It has, for example, been discovered that the oil industry buried reports of the effects of fossil-fuel emissions, and hired people to provide false data to contradict what prizewinning scientists were claiming. So whose reports do you trust?

However, I have broadened my review beyond that of ecologists or social activists – books and articles expressing their views and evidence already abound. And I'm not an ecologist, an economist or a biologist. Instead, I'm looking into the total environment within which an average person finds himself or herself today; admittedly from a Western perspective and a Buddhist one. For this, I present a fourfold map of our environment, comprising our individual and collective material domain (our own body and the Earth on which it depends) and our individual and collective immaterial domain (our minds and the views, ideologies and religions that steer our collective mind-sets). In reviewing this, my assessment is that environmental abuse is systemic and built into the ways in which we conceive of ourselves, and organized into separate collectives: classes, tribes, nations and so on.

These four represent the totality of our environment, and my conclusion is that we can't address the biosphere without addressing this totality, which I call 'the cosmos'. In brief, my argument is that the aspects of the cosmos that we have generated to organize our lives – the economy, the political bodies, the religions and cultural beliefs – have adopted a 'domination' paradigm. Initially this allowed us to dominate the Earth, and each other, but increasingly these systems dominate all of us to our detriment. And no single person or group is in control of them.

How to respond to this state of affairs, which at times seems massively immovable, is a matter for inquiry. My sense is that this status quo is in itself innately unstable – that nature, both planetary and human, cannot support a domination paradigm indefinitely, because the bottom line is that it depends on living systems whose resources are finite. The soil becomes barren or is washed away, the water and air become toxic, and climate change wreaks havoc. Also, at a certain level of stress, people just can't continue with the kind of energies and attitudes that it takes to push harder, to produce more and at the same time contribute to the degradation of their living space. Although this breakdown has a sense of inevitability to it, action is necessary to resist its effects and build up healthier alternatives. This is basic Buddhist practice: resist greed, hatred and delusion, develop restraint, goodwill and wisdom. As action is an important aspect of our humanity, to steadily desist from participating in activities that abuse life is already a powerful undertaking. I think it is our duty. Wherever possible, alternatives should be sought and developed to turn the tide.

Revolutions, quiet as well as violent, are part of our history, and I would hope that through participating in an outspoken one, albeit conducted with compassion, patience and resolve, we can restore what remains of our environment. The search for new ways of existing in the world is also a part of our ongoing history; with enough understanding of our blind spots and with the right kind of guidance, we may yet forge a more agreeable future. I feel that the Buddha's teaching (Dhamma) can offer at least some of this guidance, since the Buddha addressed human nature – the magic and the muck of it – in deep and timeless ways.

The recognition of suffering and stress is the entry point to Dhamma, along with the reminder that it doesn't have to be this way. Our human nature is capable of liberation from the root poisons of greed, hatred and delusion, and the result is greater happiness

for all. However, the totality of environmental suffering is a lot to take in, so I hope that in the ensuing pages I do not overwhelm you with statistics, or neglect to mention the more positive aspects of our situation. Admittedly the picture it presents is not cheerful, but positive solutions are suggested. I also admit that a full exploration of the environmental dilemma – with solutions – is beyond any one book and certainly beyond me. But I continue to have faith in human nature and reckon that as there are over seven billion of us, we could work it out. As a bhikkhu, I am constantly offered support to live this life; my response to that has to be to tell the truth of suffering, its causes, its ceasing and the Path to its ceasing. This book is just another aspect of that duty.

The book is structured around five main parts, with three chapters in each part. There is also a final part in which, to the extent that an ongoing story can have one, there are some concluding remarks.

The parts also contain ‘panels’ – short, self-contained pieces that present a vignette, a detail that bears on the topic of the part within which they stand. The parts are illuminated with quotes – from the Buddha and a range of other people. After each part there is a guided meditation to help the reader get back to the here and now after the conceptual journey.

Part I. Manager’s Report: We’re Costing the Earth proposes that ‘the environment’ includes our bodies and minds, and looks into the economic system that underpins the abuse of this total environment.

Part II. Refuge and Roots reviews the Buddha’s life, teachings and community to familiarize the reader with the Buddhist models for a sane and liberating environment.

Part III. Nature, Dhamma and the State is a historical review of how human collectives have responded to the environment, comparing the Aśokan Buddhist empire and indigenous culture with subsequent developments.

Part IV. The Sacredness of Nature explores how nature is held within various cultures, principally Buddhist, Judeo-Christian, animist, and what I term ‘mechanist’.

Part V. House of Many Windows: Plurality and Integration continues to review the preceding themes, but with more emphasis on the study of mind, through the twentieth century.

Part VI. A World Beyond? is an epilogue.

There is also a chronological structure: Parts I and IV are based in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; Part II goes back to the time of the Buddha; Part III centres around a Buddhist timeline in Asia from the Aśokan era to the present; and Part IV follows a similar line from the time of the Buddha to the beginning of the twentieth century, but includes the West. I have telescoped the time frames to give predominance to the modern era, as this is where we may more directly witness and respond to what the text proposes.

As far as the citations go: those that have no name appended are from the Buddhist Pali Canon. The abbreviations are unwrapped on a following page. The others, as many as I can track down, are listed in the Endnotes.

I offer my gratitude to the number of people who have offered information and feedback in terms of fashioning this book. Also to the monasteries and refuges that have given me the time and space to do the work. In particular, I would like to mention the editorial support of the Lotus Support Group, Anthony Morgan and Lisa Gorecki – and also the typesetting and design skills of Nicholas Halliday. Any errors in the presentation are of course my responsibility.

Abbreviated References to the Pali Canon, with Their English Translations

UNLESS OTHERWISE STIPULATED, THESE ARE ALL PUBLISHED BY WISDOM PUBLICATIONS,
BOSTON, USA.

A: *Anguttara Nikāya*. Translated as *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Also translated as *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* by F.L. Woodward, Pali Text Society, Oxford.

D: *Dīgha Nikāya*. Translated as *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* by Maurice Walshe.

Dhp: *Dhammapada*. Translated by Ven. Buddhārakkhita (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985).

M: *Majjhīma Nikāya*. Translated as *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* by Nyanamoli Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

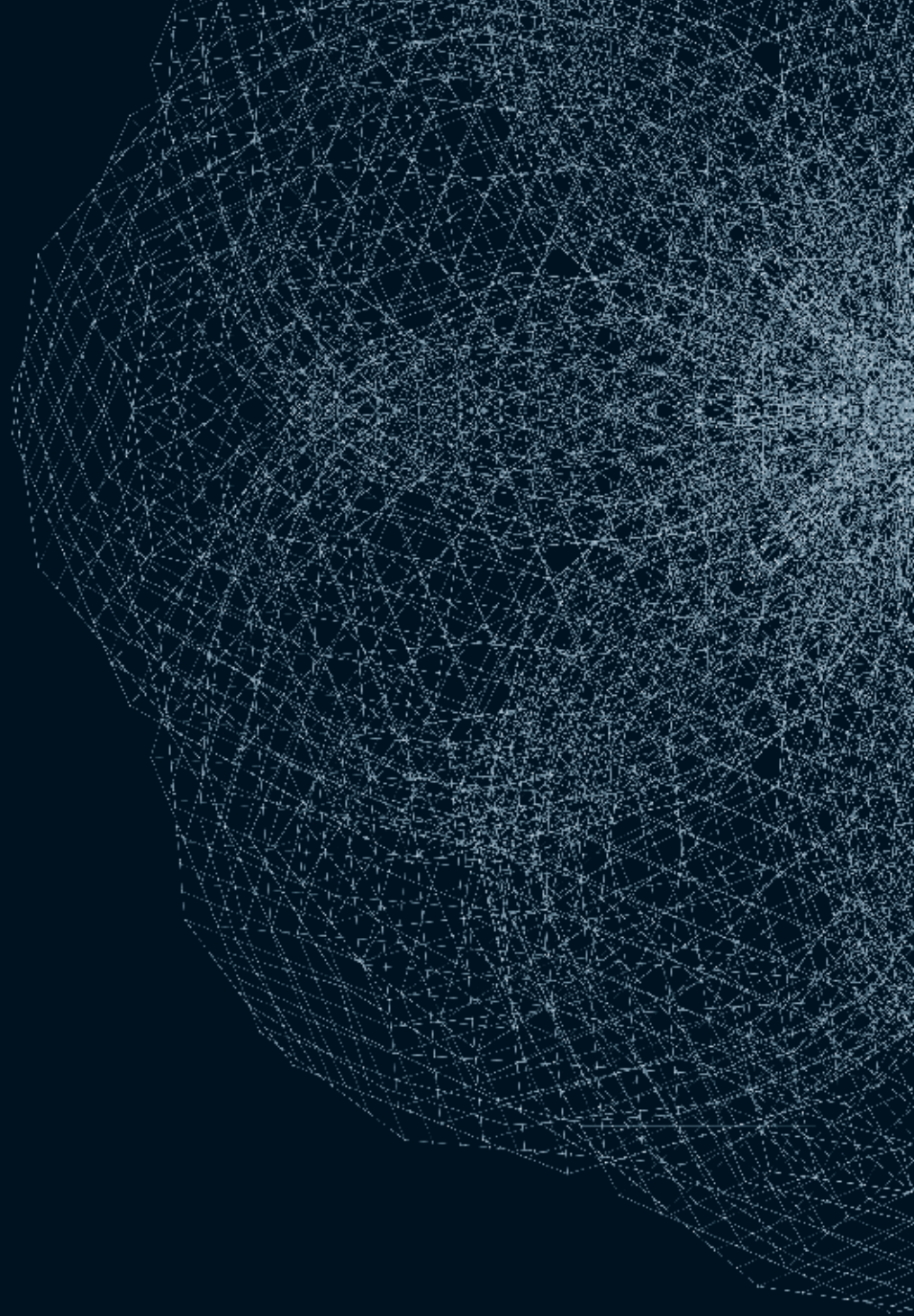
S: *Samyutta Nikāya*. Translated as *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

Snp: *Sutta-Nipāta*. Translated by Ven. Dr. H. Saddhatissa (London: Curzon Press, 1985).

THE NUMBERS APPENDED TO QUOTES FROM THESE WORKS REFER TO THE SPECIFIC
SUTTA (OR VERSE), FOLLOWED BY THE SECTION WITHIN THAT SUTTA, FOLLOWED BY
THE PARAGRAPH WITHIN THAT SECTION.

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*From the
Assisi Declarations, 1986*

*The Buddhist Declaration
on Nature by Ven. Lungrig
Namgyal Rinpoche*

We regard our survival as an undeniable right. As co-habitants of this planet, other species too have this right for survival. And since human beings as well as other non-human sentient beings depend upon the environment as the ultimate source of life and wellbeing, let us share the conviction that the conservation of the environment, the restoration of the imbalance caused by our negligence in the past, be implemented with courage and determination. These teachings lead us to the following words by His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

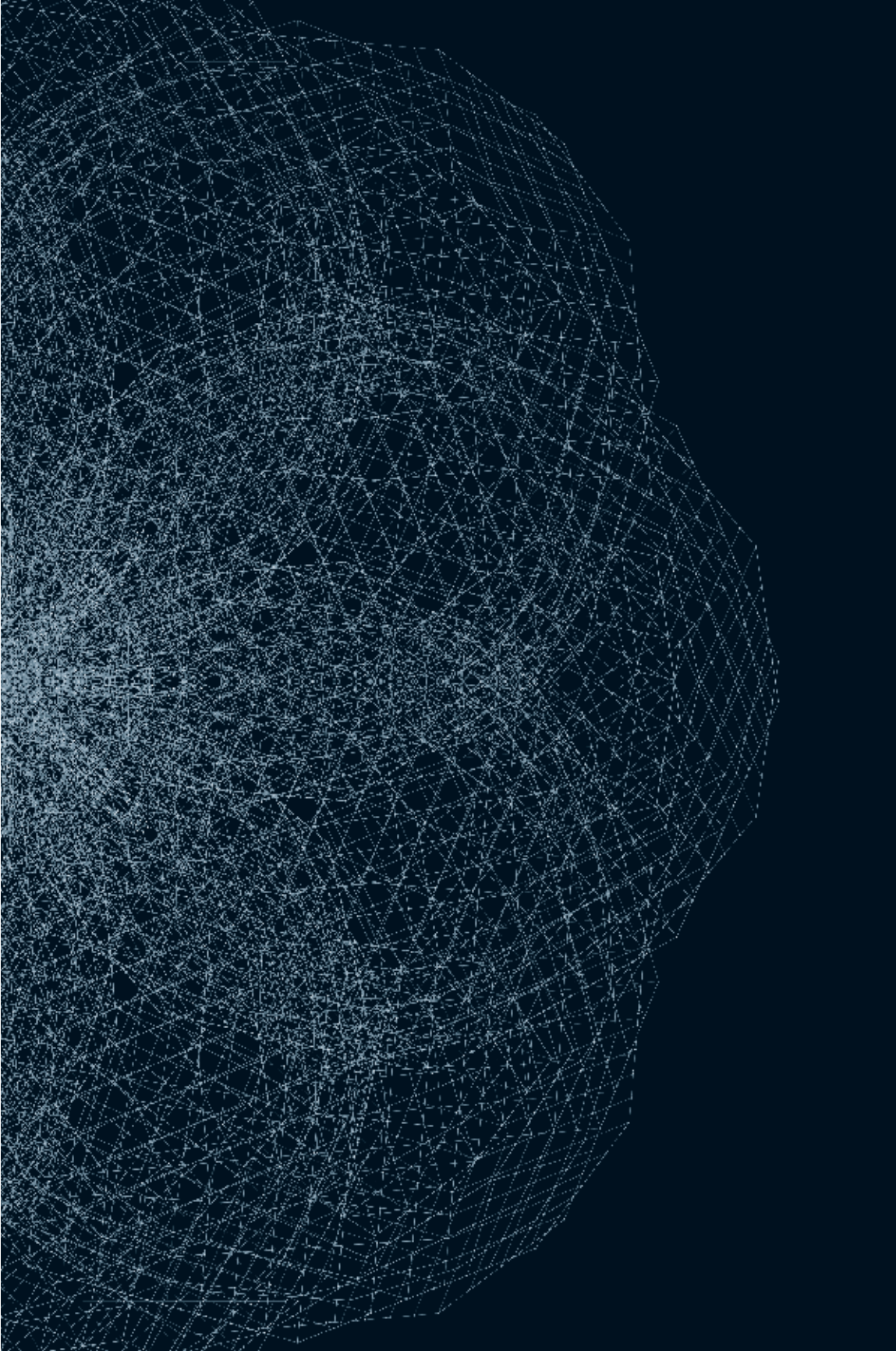
‘As we all know, disregard for the natural inheritance of human beings has brought about the danger that now threatens the peace of the world as well as the chance to live of endangered species. Such destruction of the environment and the life depending upon it is a result of ignorance, greed and disregard for the richness of all living things. This disregard is gaining great influence. If peace does not become a reality in the world and if the destruction of the environment continues as it does today, there is no doubt that future generations will inherit a dead world.


‘Our ancestors have left us a world rich in its natural resources and capable of fulfilling our needs. This is a fact. It was believed in the past that the natural resources of the Earth were unlimited, no matter how much they were exploited. But we know today that without understanding and care

these resources are not inexhaustible. It is not difficult to understand and bear the exploitation done in the past out of ignorance, but now that we are aware of the dangerous factors, it is very important that we examine our responsibilities and our commitment to values, and think of the kind of world we are to bequeath to future generations.

'It is clear that this generation is at an important crossroad. On the one hand the international community is able now to communicate each other's views, on the other hand the common fact is that confrontation far outweighs constructive dialogue for peace.

'Various crises face the international community. The mass starvation of human beings and the extinction of species may not have overshadowed the great achievements in science and technology, but they have assumed equal proportions. Side by side with the exploration of outer space, there is the continuing pollution of lakes, rivers and vast parts of the oceans, out of human ignorance and misunderstanding. There is a great danger that future generations will not know the natural habitat of animals; they may not know the forests and the animals which we of this generation know to be in danger of extinction. We are the generation with the awareness of a great danger. We are the ones with the responsibility and the ability to take steps of concrete action, before it is too late.'





Part I

*Manager's Report:
We're Costing the Earth*

I DO NOT SEE EVEN A SINGLE THING THAT SO CAUSES UNARISEN UNWHOLESOME STATES
TO ARISE AND ARISEN WHOLESOME STATES TO DECLINE AS CARELESS ATTENTION...
I DO NOT SEE EVEN A SINGLE THING THAT SO CAUSES UNARISEN WHOLESOME STATES TO
ARISE AND ARISEN UNWHOLESOME STATES TO DECLINE AS CAREFUL ATTENTION...

(A.1: 66 & 67)

BEFORE YOU FINISH EATING BREAKFAST THIS MORNING, YOU'VE DEPENDED ON MORE
THAN HALF THE WORLD. THIS IS THE WAY OUR UNIVERSE IS STRUCTURED. WE AREN'T
GOING TO HAVE PEACE ON EARTH UNTIL WE RECOGNIZE THIS BASIC FACT OF THE
INTERRELATED STRUCTURE OF REALITY.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST



Attending to Nature

WHEN WE LOOK AT A CHAIR, WE SEE THE WOOD, BUT WE FAIL TO OBSERVE THE TREE, THE FOREST, THE CARPENTER, OR OUR OWN MIND. WHEN WE MEDITATE ON IT, WE CAN SEE THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE IN ALL ITS INTERWOVEN AND INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONS IN THE CHAIR. THE PRESENCE OF THE WOOD REVEALS THE PRESENCE OF THE TREE. THE PRESENCE OF THE LEAF REVEALS THE PRESENCE OF THE SUN. THE PRESENCE OF THE APPLE BLOSSOM REVEALS THE PRESENCE OF THE APPLE. MEDITATORS CAN SEE THE ONE IN THE MANY, AND THE MANY IN THE ONE. EVEN BEFORE THEY SEE THE CHAIR, THEY CAN SEE ITS PRESENCE IN THE HEART OF LIVING REALITY. THE CHAIR IS NOT SEPARATE. IT EXISTS ONLY IN ITS INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONS WITH EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE UNIVERSE.¹

THICH NHAT HANH

PAYING ATTENTION

In March 2015, in the late summer of New Zealand, I was part of a small group in a minibus heading for the Whanganui National Park. Our aim was to spend twelve days canoeing and camping in the wilderness. One of the men wanted to take note of a phone number of the contact for our equipment; and as I was carrying a pencil and notebook, I flipped the book open for an empty page. What immediately caught my eye was a note that I had made some time ago. It consisted of a

series of statistics: ‘Woodland the size of Denmark is destroyed every year’; ‘Brazil has lost 50% of its forest’; ‘135 species of plant and animal become extinct each day’; ‘90% of fish stocks have been destroyed since 1940s’; ‘23% mammals, 47% fish, 12% birds are endangered.’ The figures were from *Green Dharma*, a book written in 2008.²

I imagine the authors did some accurate research, and I don’t know what the figures are now. But in 2008, for example, the Aral Sea, the fourth largest lake in the world, still existed; now what remains are a couple of small lakes that occupy 10% of a saline desert. The head-

1.1

Trees

- A tree of 15 metres in height has a surface area of 200 hectares (the size of Monaco), all of which is breathing.
- A tree absorbs CO₂, and is 20% –50% composed of CO₂. It also takes up heavy metals and stores them in its wood. Older trees can store more pollutants than young ones.
- A tree releases 15–30kg of oxygen per year. A human being takes in 700gm/day, 255kg/year. Therefore ten trees support one person per year.
- Trees both humidify and cool the atmosphere. A 50 sq. metre woodland brings the temperature down by 3.5 degrees, and increases humidity by 50%.
- The roots of trees circulate water, taking rainwater in at over 70 times the rate of grass. This checks run-off, the process whereby rain washes topsoil away. A tree channels water through its roots, deep into the soil where it is stored to moisten the earth.
- Trees communicate via the mycelial network. This is the web of tiny fungi that live on their

roots and in the soil, through which plants send chemical signals.

- Trees provide subsistence for 1.6 billion people and provide 50% of the Earth’s biodiversity. In Japan, the practice of ‘forest bathing’ (shinrin-yoku) – that is, walking and sitting amongst trees – has been shown to improve emotional well-being and to boost the body’s immune system. These latter effects are apparently attributable to the antimicrobial oils that trees breathe into the air.
- 50% of the world’s forest was destroyed in the 20th century. Between 2003 and 2005, 7.3 million hectares of tropical forest were destroyed every year = 20,000 hectares per day. In 2017, woodland loss amounted to the equivalent of one football field every second. This loss alone accounts for 15% –20% of CO₂ emissions.

SOURCES

Francis Hallé: *Du bon usage des arbres* (Arles: Actes Sud Editions, 2011).

Peter Wohlleben: *The Hidden Life of Trees*, trans. Greystone Books (Munich: Ludwid Verlag, 2015)

waters of the Aral have been diverted in Uzbekistan to water the crop of introduced cotton and this kind of cotton is very thirsty: it takes an estimated 2,700 litres to produce enough cotton for one shirt.

I imagine you've read uncomfortable reports like these on the impact of humans on the natural world. Some of the most stirring ones concern climate change. The level of CO₂ in the atmosphere is above the safe maximum, thus causing a 'greenhouse' warming effect. Consequently, the Arctic ice cap and a big chunk of Antarctica are melting, and on top of this the thawing of the Siberian tundra is releasing methane, a gas that has a greenhouse effect thirty times more potent than CO₂. Consequently, sea levels are rising and island nations and most coastal areas (where major cities like Shanghai, New York, Bangkok and London, as well as most of Bangladesh, are located) are threatened with submersion. Furthermore, the oceans absorb CO₂, thereby becoming acidified – and that damages the micro-fauna at the bottom of the marine food chain; so as their food supplies decrease, fish die out. And so on. There is a consensus amongst scientists that climate change is due to human action, most notably the burning of coal, oil and gas – so-called 'fossil fuels'. The current rise in temperature is currently about one degree Celsius, but this is bringing with it an increase in hurricanes, flooding, tornadoes, droughts and forest fires. However, if all the estimated reserves of these fossil fuels are extracted and used, the prediction is that the mean temperature of the planet will rise by at least four degrees by the end of the 21st century, so that most of the Earth will be desert or ocean. Meanwhile, as Australia and California endure year after year of forest fires and drought, and the ongoing melt-down of the Himalayan glaciers threatens the population of China and India with water shortage, companies are exploring new areas for extraction of oil, and the fossil-fuel industry continues to develop by extracting shale gas through fracking. Politicians meet periodically to investigate ways of limiting the rise in temperatures to two degrees

(which, when you note the effects of one degree, is hardly a cause for comfort); some doubt that even this is possible. Maybe like me, you see the reports and predictions, boggle long enough to feel alarmed or dismissive, but, feeling that there's not much one can do about it, your attention shifts.

In my case, I let the feeling move through, as I gazed at the page for a few seconds. Then I looked out the window at a lovely day in pastoral New Zealand: green fields, trees and a few farm buildings. All seemed well, because I wasn't here two hundred years ago when this was all forest crammed with birds. Yes, beautiful New Zealand has been ravaged by humans too: the Maori ate their way through all nine species of moa bird, and the European settlers cleared huge areas of forest for pasture, burning it down where it was too difficult to extract. And together we brought the rats, the pigs, the deer and the possums that have transformed the local biosphere. Nowadays, New Zealand is one of the most conservation-conscious nations in the world – but for many species here and throughout the world, such efforts came too late.

With regard to the future, there still remains the question of how an increasing human population can exist on this planet without destroying it. Because even nuclear-free and hydro-powered New Zealand is a great country for meat production – and the statistics on the livestock industry are also chilling.

Apart from the consideration that billions of animals are kept in cramped conditions (such as cages that they can't even turn round in), mutilated and slaughtered every year (53 billion was the 2013 figure³) to feed our appetites, the amount of woodland that has been and is being cleared every year to support these animals is colossal. This produces a simple equation: more land for livestock equals less land for other forms of life. Yet rearing meat is also a far less efficient way of producing food than vegetables: the World Health Organization estimates that whereas twenty-two people could live

off a hectare of potatoes and nineteen off a hectare of rice, that same hectare will only provide enough beef for just one person, or lamb for two. Livestock uses 83% of farmland to produce 18% of our calories. It also consumes the majority of soya beans produced in the USA (three-quarters of the entire global production), as well as a third of the planet's cereals. Then there's the use of water: when factory-farmed, one kilogram of beef requires 15,000 litres of water to produce.⁴ So livestock take in a lot of the planet's resources; and they create their own pollution: according to the UN's 2006 report *Livestock's Long Shadow*, the methane from livestock accounts for 18% of all human-caused greenhouse gases; more in fact than the transport industry.^{5*}

It's not easy to keep one's eyes open to all this. There are only so many statistics you can consume before you switch off; their abstraction puts nothing in your hands that you can work on, and the picture they draw is grim. But you wonder, as there's so much information on the damage that we're causing the planet and ourselves – why we don't change our act? Or get some people in charge to do it for us? We could, for example, begin by reducing our meat consumption – because, whatever one's ethical position on killing animals, if we look at the topic steadily we have to recognize that the planet can't feed us all on meat (and that includes fish). Why do governments continue to grant licences to fossil-fuel industries that ravage the irreplaceable resources that we depend upon? A review is needed, on many levels: is there a limit to the number of people this planet can sustain? What does that imply? Even with the existing population, how can we sustain our lives? Is anybody even 'in charge'? And as a footnote: does Buddhism, or any aspect of it, offer any guidance on this?

*Methane stays in the atmosphere for 20-30 years; but CO₂ stays in the atmosphere for 100-200 years. So some of the current change is caused by CO₂ emissions from the nineteenth century. And the CO₂ that is going into the atmosphere now will have an escalating effect for another century at least.

In Buddhist terms, what are right attitude, right action and right livelihood in this scenario? Well, there is the recommendation to be vigilant, to use careful attention, and to live modestly and abstain from violating others. True enough for personal guidelines – but maybe it's time to widen the frame of reference to review the systems that govern our lives. No individual farmer is interested in wrecking the planet; but farming livestock has become the way to feed people, and a way to make a living. The information that to feed the current global population of the planet on meat would require a land area four times the size of the Earth somehow evades attention. And no one even has a handle on the fact that 250 babies are born every minute. How will all those bodies get fed? There has to be an alternative. And yet other ways of providing for our needs are not in evidence, seem tenuous, and would require a cultural and economic shift that vote-conscious governments would be wary of undertaking, even if they believed in the alternative. But before attending to contentious specific details, careful attention to the environment, by which I mean exploring its interwoven factors and their nature, may be worthwhile.

A WHOLE WORLD REVIEW

Considering that every material thing we use has to come from a planet that has limitations, a managerial review must begin with looking at its resources. All material things – food, houses, clothes and our thousands of commodities – have their origins in the stuff of this planet. All we produce by ourselves are thoughts and intentions, and to do even that requires an input of air, food, coffee, and so on. We can produce babies, but that again depends on food and water – and a climate that supports life. This is the only planet we know that can provide the conditions that make human life possible. The planet itself is rugged and has persisted for 4.5 billion years, producing life forms about 3.5 billion years ago. Homo sapiens showed up about

200,000 years ago. Conclusion: Earth doesn't belong to us, and got on fine without us; we belong to Earth, were born out of it, depend on it operating within certain climatic conditions and can't get by without it. A wise manager would urge care with regard to the given materials.

Further: life – conscious, responsive, and self-regenerating arrangements of molecules – is rare in the universe. On this planet it is abundant and resilient and produces creatures that, although subject to death, also reproduce. A brilliant feature of how life and the Earth fit each other is the way that creatures manage the environment: trees produce oxygen and lock carbon into their tissues, and animals prune trees and fertilize the earth. The biosphere as an entirety manages the balance of gases in the atmosphere that we breathe, the acid balance and purity of the water we drink, and the coverage of cloud that shields us from harmful solar radiation. However, since we appeared on the planet, thousands of species have been rendered extinct, and the extinction rate is accelerating. Conclusion: humans can and do operate in ways that are detrimental to life and the management of the planet that life supports. The recommendation has to be to attend carefully to the biosphere that manages our resources.

However, the material world is only one part of our environment – although it becomes an accessory to the other domains that we operate within. These other domains include our bodies, our minds and our collective mind-set. Obviously our own bodies, although a part of the biosphere, compete with other creatures for food and shelter; so we are inclined to its welfare above the lives of other creatures. 'Man killed by shark' is headline news; '100 million sharks killed every year' (through fishing, sport, having their fins cut off for soup), or 'Sharks face extinction' merits only an article in an environmental magazine. (Yet it is sharks, not humans, who are

reckoned as bloodthirsty.*) Yet in our case, concern for our bodies far exceeds that which would grant survival: cosmetics, fashion and adornments draw resources from the planet, and the marketing of fallacious remedies such as the horn hacked off rhinos, bile siphoned from the gall bladder of bears, or scales from pangolins (the pangolin has currently been awarded ‘most hunted animal’ status and constitutes 20% of the illegal wildlife market) needlessly and brutally ravage the biosphere. And still, although the average person lives a few years longer, we are physically weaker than our hunter-gatherer predecessors. Needless to say, this aspect of our world is also still bound to sickness, degeneration and death.

Another aspect of our environment is our mind. This mind gets organized around a ‘self’, a central reference that is experienced as an immaterial entity. It is associated with the body, but is directed by feelings, notions and influenced by immaterial qualities such as greed and love, fear and generosity. It seeks meaning, and towards this end refers to experiences other than those that are happening to the senses right now; in other words, using imagination. This imagining capacity allows us to anticipate, plan, speculate and create wonderful and terrifying ideas. Above all, the self is most deeply involved with its creations: its future, its territory, its status with regard to others and its value with regard to itself. In this respect, its creations are ‘mythic’, i.e. carrying meaning. Through this it projects qualities such as beauty onto its body, even though this often conflicts with the reality of bodily life. It is rarely still, frequently anxious and needing assurance, and is motivated by mental states such as knowledge, prestige, superiority and being attractive to others. It is definitely not independent, though at times it claims to be.

As in the case of the body, this aspect of our environment instead extracts a huge tariff from the material world and from other humans in terms of sport, entertainment, and armaments to keep us amused, and safe (although they don’t actually do that). How

*The between 1 and 4 fatalities due to sharks each year compare favourably with death (in 2007) by dogs (20) or by bikes (747). Bloodthirsty bikes? But it’s the myth that grabs public opinion: sharks are ‘evil’ and dogs are ‘loveable’.

many billions are spent on weapons alone? How much energy, and applied intelligence? Isn't there a better way to live? It's all based on perception and feeling. Hi-tech weaponry wreaks havoc on the human and animal population to an extent unimaginable to early mankind – but one gun may make me *feel* safe (until I meet someone with a more powerful gun, or a grenade). And self is instinctively motivated by how things *seem*, rather than guided by reason. Taken overall, and despite its constant efforts and appetite, the self doesn't produce the security or happiness that it desires: we get lonely, bored and depressed. And self-destructive: we are the only creatures that willingly take toxic drugs and commit suicide.

The mental ability to produce and calculate abstractions weaves the fourth domain of our environment. This gift produces symbols and concepts, language and numbers, and creates systems like writing and software that connect us to other humans. Call this domain 'collective mentality'. It is immaterial, yet it organizes our existence through abstractions that the selves of the collective agree upon. This domain acquires virtual form as 'next week', 'my people' and 'our territory' (which comes to mean 'our right to possess the land and prevent others from doing the same'). Thus a world of imagined time and belonging arises along with the need to navigate within that. The navigation begins with taboos, rules, laws and plans; it organizes people into collectives. These collectives are governed by beliefs, principles and empowered individuals; under their supervision, trade, science and induction into the collective mind-set take place. Such 'education' suggests that humans are more meaningful than other creatures and superior to them, and presents history, missions, rights and even life after death.

This collective mentality is very powerful. Through this we have subjugated the rest of the biosphere and created enterprises that network the globe; and we continue to scan the universe and to describe the heavens or hells that await us. Through our collective strength and intelligence we have knowledge, order, and the ability to fashion the environment to suit our needs. But there is a price to pay for this. For the sake of the collective, individuals will sacrifice or be compelled to forfeit their lives (for my nation, my God, justice,

liberty). The collective domain is complex and rationally constructed, but the raw material of its fabric is not rational but instinctive: the desire for agreeable feeling, physical and mental; for safety, comfort, ease, control or entertainment now or in the future that the self creates. And yet if we investigate, we can't say that acting on these instincts necessarily collects us into a secure and comfortable group. For a start, membership of the group requires putting aside individual interests, so aspects of one's self aren't included – mental states such as uncertainty or fear are often shamed, along with performances that aren't adequate to the needs of the group. And although rationality may try to prune and organize our mental states, they are based on instinct, imagination and feeling. These are all subjective and differ from individual to individual.

We are also made aware that collectives entail some sacrifice or a fee. They exclude other creatures or members of other human collectives; if we are one of these 'others', we may be despised, feared or blamed for the other group's misfortune. The principles that should moderate a collective are therefore those of ethics and compassion. This is because the more knowledge and power grow, the more they can be employed in abusive ways: crusades, warfare and conquest are a constant feature of human experience. We are also aware that ethics and compassion do not govern the human collective in any manifest way: about 100 million of us were directly killed in wars in the twentieth century, and a similar number killed by their own collectives in various Holocausts, Purges and Revolutions. Even in non-combat zones, individuals in the most advantaged collectives of our contemporary world suffer anxiety, depression, addictions, phobias and mental disorders through a lack of compassionate or ethical management. Stress from working at a pace that is alien to the human nervous system is quite normal. In brief, an unwise collective brings with it a good deal of separating and discarding of fellow humans, let alone the elimination of much of the biosphere.

THE COSMOS AND THE CHAOS

So this is what we are involved with, our total environment, or 'the cosmos' for short. The four domains of our cosmos are co-dependent: my mind takes this sensate body as a base and is involved in the world that consciousness presents. Although it purports to be my 'self', an autonomous entity, it needs and seeks orientation within a material or immaterial environment. Numb my nerves and I can't operate or feel where I am; refrain from talking to an infant and they are liable to suffer autism, or even death. And of course, if the air is poisoned, my body fails and consciousness no longer arises. My self is profoundly affected by many interactions: its body depends on the first domain, that of the material world; and the socio-cultural system moulds, edits and presents directions to my self. Either through my own choice or that of the collective, I may carry out many decisive actions with regard to the material world; hunt, fish, dam rivers, or remove woodland; or alternatively venerate totem animals and create wildlife reserves. Moreover, the land affects my culture: its fertility may encourage songs and festivals or support agricultural development – and that may hand over land to sheep, even assert that they are an essential feature of our culture. Consequently, our bodies soften into a settled way of life, and towns arise. However, as the sheep graze the hills bare, trees disappear and floods become likely, affecting these towns, and our lives, for the worse. On the other hand, some people give religious significance to animals, trees or phases of the moon, and others feel moved to preserve this domain; these directives also moderate human behaviour and affect the biosphere.

In brief, the review would conclude that the four domains interact and shape each other. There is no single unit, only everything. But we are now in a position where if our collective mentality isn't given careful attention, the cosmos breaks down. A wise manager might add all this up and ask: 'What's really worthwhile?'



Valuables versus Values

BUDDHIST ECONOMICS MUST BE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE ECONOMICS OF MODERN MATERIALISM, SINCE THE BUDDHIST SEES THE ESSENCE OF CIVILIZATION NOT IN A MULTIPLICATION OF WANTS BUT IN THE PURIFICATION OF HUMAN CHARACTER. IT IS NOT WEALTH THAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF LIBERATION BUT THE ATTACHMENT TO WEALTH; NOT THE ENJOYMENT OF PLEASURABLE THINGS BUT THE CRAVING FOR THEM. THE KEYNOTE OF BUDDHIST ECONOMICS, THEREFORE, IS SIMPLICITY AND NON-VIOLENCE.⁶

E.F. SCHUMACHER: *SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL* (PP. 59-60)

THE VALUE OF VALUING

When we talk of caring for the environment, we generally mean looking after the habitat that other creatures occupy, but, as is the case with every other creature, the welfare of others would seem to be secondary to our own. One fundamental difference between us and other self-interested animals is that our mind and our herd have virtual realities that can massively extend – and require hardware to back them up. A wildebeest may have a built-in self-preservation program, it may form part of a herd for breeding and safety, but it has no interest in acquiring land, conquering another nation or getting employees to support its enterprise and guarantee it a plump bank

balance. Humans, however, can stake claims on areas of the cosmos beyond those that are directly sensed in the here and now. We also can place another's welfare (normally that of our children) above our own, and give our time, energy and even our lives for their welfare. We widen out of narrow self-interest because with this act and what lies behind it, our own lives are enriched.

This potential also means that we establish values that shift us out of selfish behaviour; and we can educate others in these values. Education is in the domain of the collective mentality – which by and large uses it to induct us into the current socio-cultural perspective on our world: human history, religious beliefs, the melting point of ice and how to manage a business. This domain has to be the one to cultivate, because its basic function is to impart value. Although we can value art or gold or literacy, the most essential kind of valuing widens our perspectives beyond narrow self-interest to include the entirety of what we're born out of and what sustains us. There can't be anything more valuable than what gives us life, health, meaning and friendship. To value this cosmos of body, Earth, individual and collective mind is a 'religious' act: one that recognizes that it's something that none of us alone can create. The fourfold cosmos extends beyond us, we're part of it; and whether we like or even know every aspect of it – it's valid. And to reverse the argument: the more of the cosmos that a value system includes, the more valid that value system (religion, philosophy, ideology) is.

To bring this theoretical map down to earth: as none of us can live long or meaningfully without contributions from other people – and even more fundamentally, we can't survive long without water or air – a primary value has to be one of living with a sense of mutuality, and with respect for the environment. This intention if acted upon has its effects: just as tweaking one current in a river will alter the flow, and that will affect the valley that the river shapes, along with its vegetation and micro-fauna (and so on up the line), you can't act

on a part of the cosmos without affecting the whole. So if we use water, soil, and biota extensively in our lives, and yet don't consider them intrinsically valuable in themselves, then we experience a broken cosmos. If they're just stuff that we use and dispose of, then other people get to appear that way; and the effects of that attitude bounce back on us to devalue our own lives.

The rest of the biosphere has built-in checks and balances: it has no capacity for abstract reasoning, it is subject to predation, and it doesn't cultivate and store resources to the extent that we do. But in our case, self-interest offers domination; and if we ignore, or don't see beyond that, our greed, hatred and delusion suffuse the cosmos.

This wrong-seeing sets in when we fixate on one aspect as being the only one that counts: for example, if I hold my thoughts, my norms, my physical needs, or my social group as the best, the supreme. This 'supremacist view' thus reduces my respect and concern for others. We might say that we are superior to earthworms and bees – who can't read, write, or design computer software. So their lives don't count for much. Actually, in terms of the cosmos, worms and bees are at least as important as us: one helps to generate and aerate soil and keep it fertile; the other pollinates flowers and thereby triggers the production of fruit. Without them, we're finished. But without humans ... the biosphere would heave a corporate sigh of relief and thrive. When we're narrow-minded, all that makes us superior is the ability to dominate.

This view hits the ground through materialism, an attitude and approach that places the material domain in a paradoxical relationship to the others. In this view, some materials are worth fighting over, while others are deemed to be worthless stuff. These contradictory attitudes set up consumerism and disposability: one encourages consumption in order to feel happy, whereas the other encourages pollution by assuming that the Earth is a bottomless trash can. Self-contradiction is a mark of the domination-exploitation

mind-set. The ongoing extinction of fauna and poisoning of air and water are good signs of the damage that careless attention could bring about: and still for us in our materialist trance, it can feel like things are improving.

1.2

Land for Money: Intensive Agriculture

USA PRODUCTION

While The Dietary Guidelines for Americans call for reducing one's intake of saturated fat and cholesterol, federal subsidies favour the production of meat and dairy products that are the principal sources of these hazardous components.

Corn and soybeans, which together have received \$96 billion in subsidies between 1995 and 2010, are primarily used for animal feed by industrial livestock operations, and also go into processed sugars (like high fructose corn syrup), fats (like soybean oil) and ethanol.*

Fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes for human consumption receive only about 2% of all subsidies.

CONSUMPTION

According to a database compiled by the Environmental Working Group, roughly \$200 billion was spent to subsidize U.S. commodity crops from 1995 to 2010. (Commodity crops are those that are produced for the market. They include storable items such as grains and certain beans, cotton and tobacco – as distinct from human edibles such as fruit and vegetables.) About \$50 billion went to human-food crops, including wheat, peanuts, rice, oilseeds and other crops that become

sweeteners. About \$12 billion went to crops that were turned into ethanol, a use that is consuming a growing share of the harvest.

POLICY

In addition to these subsidies, the U.S. Department for Agriculture pays about \$5 billion directly to commodity-crop farmers – whether they use the land or not. Three-quarters of the direct subsidies go to the top ten percent of commodity-cropland owners; \$400 million of the total in 2010 went to individuals who live in cities with populations over 100,000 and hold the land as an investment. Millions more went to land-owning corporations, including real estate firms.

‘We’ve locked up food production with a policy that says, “Thou shalt not grow fruits and vegetables,”’ says Ferdinand Hoefner, policy director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, a group that lobbies for small- and mid-size farms.

The U.S. farm lobby affects who gets voted in as member of Congress. ‘Everybody agrees that direct subsidies to big farmers ought to be stopped, but nobody wants to say he was against subsidies if he’s campaigning in Iowa,’ says Nestle. ‘It’s a locked-in system.’

*63% of domestic food subsidies supported crops grown for feed or livestock directly; 20% supported grains for human consumption; and 15% went to crops that would become sugar or sweeteners, starch, oil, and alcohol.

SOURCES:

Myplate.com; Arthur Allen: *Washington Post*, October 3, 2011; Kelly Moltzen: 'Subsidies and Specialty Crops: An Analysis of the Current State of U.S. Agricultural Policy.' (from Academia.edu website.)

UK/EU: Livestock and grazing subsidies (2013 statistics).

Average subsidy for sheep farms in Wales = £53,000 p.a. Average net income = £35,000 p.a. Farm subsidies cost the UK £3.6 billion per year.

EU agricultural subsidies cost £47 billion (43% of EU budget).

To qualify for a subsidy, EU policy is that land has to have no more than fifty trees per hectare. A fine of £64 million was levied on the government of Northern Ireland for granting a subsidy to farmers whose hedgerows were too wide.

In supporting the eradication of trees from hills, this policy unintentionally reduces the land's ability to absorb rain, and thus supports flooding. In England and Wales, floods cause around £1.2 billion of damage per year.

SOURCE: George Monbiot: *Feral* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2013).

SCHIZOID VIEW

The materialist mind-set is credited with great leaps forward in terms of human comfort and life expectancy, but even if that's true, it depends on materials; and they are now running out. And it continues through attention shifts that are schizoid. For example, the use of insecticides continues. Currently it's been estimated that the population of flying insects in Germany has fallen by 76% over the last twenty-seven years; hence alarm bells sound around pollination and in turn food production. It's unlikely that Germany is an isolated instance, because the practice of drenching soils in poisons is still a standard one; recently it was discovered that the bird population of France has dropped by a third due to the same causes. And this is fifty years after Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* exposed the damage that DDT was doing to the environment. As she commented in those pages:

The ‘control of nature’ is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man ... It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has also turned them against the earth.⁷

Well, we did learn a little: the use of DDT was banned, and recently, after years of debate, the use of chemicals called ‘nicotinoids’ was judged to be harmful to bees, so they too were banned (in Europe at least). However, the underlying attitude remains unquestioned: rather than study, respect and cooperate with nature, humans continue to harness and exploit it. The driving principle behind this is financial: chemical manufacturers benefit and there is a short-term improved crop yield before the effects kick in. The long-term effects are a loss of life and a loss of soil: in 2014, a UN official commented that at the current rate of degradation, all the world’s topsoil could be gone within sixty years.⁸

A wiser manager would comment that if we allowed more hedgerows, or for a few trees to mingle in our fields, we would support the life forms that moderate insect populations; and that if we reduced the amount of land used for livestock production and gave more land over to arables, we could spare some loss of cabbages and not need to exterminate insects. However, that manager might not know that European farmers are subsidized to keep land clear of non-productive vegetation.* In our drive for greater efficiency, we have now constructed a system, and from the system’s point of view, the living earth is a food factory – so keep the floor clean. The economy (the word comes from the Greek ‘house management’) has lost touch with ecology (‘house knowledge’). The manager (if there is one) is in a trance.

*See Panel 1.2

This trance underlies many of our personal and systemic blind spots. It means that on account of the economy we trash the natural world, at the same time as wanting to make it our playground. We love clean beaches and their sparkling water, yet dump sewage and enough plastic in all the oceans to create vast trash gyres (some larger than Texas). Some 18 billion pounds of plastic go into the oceans each year, where they eventually break down into micro-particles. As fish consume these particles, the plastic goes up the food chain and into our bodies. Styrofoam, plastic bottles = hormone disruption and chromosome damage.

The bottled water industry began its rapid growth in the late 70s, was worth \$157 billion by 2013 and is expected to earn \$280 billion by 2020. Americans alone currently throw away fifty million bottles per day; in Britain, we buy 13 billion per year and recycle 3 billion of those. To careful attention, it doesn't make sense: why spend huge amounts on buying water, when with a clean water system, you can drink the stuff out of the tap for a fraction of the cost, with no plastic to dispose of? Answer: to careless attention, the tinted, shapely bottles look good, and can be sold. Recycling, although growing, is still minimal; recycled plastic doesn't look good, and doesn't sell. Yet it takes seven litres of water to produce a single litre plastic bottle. A million of these bottles were bought every minute in 2017; the figure is expected to rise to an annual total of 500 billion in 2021 with only 7% being recycled. At this rate, and since the population of fish has shrunk by over 50% in the last hundred years, there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050.

We get excited at the sight of wild animals, and images of happy pigs, cute lambs and motherly cows are part of our children's education; but we've reduced the population of wildlife by half in the last forty years (losses expected to rise to 67% by 2020 according to the WWF and Zoological Society of London); and condemned farmed animals (1 billion pigs, 1 billion sheep, 1 billion cows and 25

billion chickens) to a brief existence characterized by castration, dehorning, forced impregnation, debeaking and life in a crate. (What are the slogans? 'I'm lovin' it.' 'Finger-licking good.')

We love open landscapes and forests, yet tear up an area of land the size of England and Wales in Alberta for oil extraction. (In which cyanide, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead and mercury are 'stored' in huge tailing lakes that cover 68 sq. miles.) A lake of toxic sludge in Inner Mongolia is the result of extracting 'rare earth' minerals used in the smartphones that we watch movies about nature on. And so on. It's necessary for the economy and for the lifestyle that we've been inducted into.

In this schizoid view I am sometimes reminded of seeing a caricature pig outside a restaurant when I was a child. The smiling pig was a placard bearing a menu that advertised the bacon, sausages and other pork dishes available inside. Even at the age of ten, I did a double take on the logic of something happily offering its body to be eaten. Maybe I looked too hard. The image is a fiction, but it has an effect: the meat is psychologically distanced from a real animal who is reduced to the status of a commodity. Now it has a new name. It isn't part of a pig's body, but 'pork'.

It's a mental conjuring trick, supported by a fascination with superficial appearance that the Buddha called 'careless attention' (*ayoniso manasikāra*). It means we can 'see' a world of objects that conform to our fantasies, wishes, and phobias: supermodels and suspicious immigrants, idols and witch-hunts. We can also receive information and not make the underlying connections; like, poison insects = poison bees; poison water = poison yourself; traffic fumes and factory chimneys = the death of 1.7 million children per year. It also means that we can skip over other awkward equations, like livestock = habitat destruction and greenhouse gas.

The effects of this ignorance infiltrate the cosmos. Once the values-view of 'to others as to myself' has faded, it affects our human

relationships. Devaluation is the basis of slavery, racism, gender and economic inequality. Whereas trading can bring around fair exchange and foster relationship, an economy based on the accumulation of material goods (or rather, tokens) supports greed and manipulation. A system of exchange becomes a system of hoarding.* In this, some people obtain large amounts of 'wealth' while others are born wealthy through inheritance, and the wealthy can buy other people's service and therefore increase their influence in the society and on the political structures that guide that society. Other people go out of business, don't get tax breaks, or have to accept the pay deals forged by those with influence.

Undoubtedly, supremacy and power can feel very good. That feeling then enhances their meaning and infiltrates the value system. And we want it to last. So materialism valorizes hoarding over exchange, and acquires authority. It's a myth, a quasi-religion. Its Word is the economy, and its Church is that of global institutions; it exercises power through laws such as liquidity, inflation, and exchange rates; and it has a sacrament – money – pieces of which we are offered on paydays. The glowing power of the economy obscures a significant feature of our cosmos – namely that most of it wasn't created by humans – and yet it exerts enormous influence over our lives. Wages and taxes determined by the state of a local economy determine how and where people live. But the local economy isn't even governed by the people they trade with, but by international trading agreements. These are forged by economic adepts, through number-crunching, predictions, interest and debt. In the blur of that electronically-powered sorcery, it's no wonder that the agreements fail to qualify economic growth with measures to protect the biosphere.

*Some societies still use trade as a means of forming bonds, kinship and loyalty: members of the far-flung Trobriand archipelago still travel great distances to exchange, for no other reason than to interconnect.⁹

One consequence is commodification: the biosphere, including us, is largely used to produce money. For instance, large quantities of netted fish are simply thrown back dead into the ocean as being of no commercial use; farms are subsidized, at a higher rate for meat than for fruit or vegetables, to produce food whether it's eaten or not. Of the food that does reach the market, a significant proportion is thrown away; meanwhile, millions of people go hungry.* So the environment is not used to feed people in a direct way; it is used to feed the market, and thereby make money. Money can't create the biosphere – life forms that range from bacteria to plankton to trees and carnivores and that regulate the gases, the soil, the rainfall and other people – yet money is what everything gets converted into.

As far as products go, it pays to build in obsolescence, so that the commodities have to be replaced every few years or less. Hence landfills and huge piles of trash get generated, the oceans are scattered with debris on account of the dumping of obsolete products, and toxins are leaked into the soil, air and water.**

In summary, the commodities market supports a process of extracting resources from the earth, only to return them there in concentrated, poisonous forms.

So, check it out. Alberta Tar Sands? Niger Delta? Trash heaps the size of hills? Gyres of plastic in the ocean? Sixth global extinction? Is anyone in charge of this? Even in simple economic terms it doesn't

*As much as half of the world's food, amounting to two billion tonnes' worth, ends up being thrown away, a UK-based report has claimed. The Institution of Mechanical Engineers said the waste was being caused by poor storage, strict sell-by dates, bulk offers and consumer fussiness. The study also found that up to 30% of vegetables in the UK were not harvested because of their physical appearance. It suggested that half the food bought in Europe and the USA was thrown away. Moreover, the report – *Global Food; Waste Not, Want Not* – also found that huge amounts of water, totalling 550 billion cubic metres, was being used to grow crops that were never eaten.¹⁰

**According to UN figures, the USA alone buries 222 million tons of household waste a year. China is fast catching up with 148 million tonnes. As the rubbish degrades it gives off landfill gas, 50% of which is methane and up to 40% is CO₂, making landfill sites one of the biggest producers of methane gas in the world.¹¹ According to *USA Today* (August 15, 2017), industrial and agricultural pollutants exposed 63 million people to unsafe water in the past decade in the USA.

make sense: A recent IMF report stated that the fossil-fuel industry costs us (at a conservative estimate) \$5.2 trillion per year through cleaning up, medical and social costs – i.e. when communities are uprooted through mining and drilling, crime and drunkenness increase. These costs are covered by the public sector; they amount to a virtual subsidy, because the polluter doesn't pay.¹² The view is that we can't change the economy, because that would throw people out of work, create poverty and cause social upheaval.* Based upon this view, the reasoning is that despite a few rough spots, the current socio-economic model is the best and there's no alternative. Meanwhile, someone's getting rich.

Well, maybe it's time to tear up that script, because upheaval in all areas of the cosmos is what the current economic imbalance is bringing around. In detail: social dystopia, individual neurosis and depression, sub-standard living, the rise of fundamentalism, hence divisive religious movements (in Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism) and ecological collapse. How? Domination and exploitation have always held a demonic attraction to the human mind; but that mind-set got empowered in the West in the seventeenth century as science split from religion, and machines magnified the potential for exploitation. The cosmos became subject to scientific (=object focused) perspectives, and converting the Earth's resources into money became a reliable large-scale option. So companies were set up that attracted loans with the promise of delivering these resources and the goods manufactured from them in the future. Banks managed the loans and charged interest on those loans, establishing a debt system in which the debtor is required to pay back more than the original loan. This means that the company has to keep growing to stay ahead of bankruptcy. Consequently, two drives are inevitable. One is to produce an increasing amount of commodities, and the other is to employ people for as little as is practical or legal in order to minimize costs.

*Who says? Naomi Klein compares the public value of spending \$5 billion for the Northern Gateway oil pipeline in Canada, with spending the same sum on renewable sources of energy. The latter method would grant thirty-four times more jobs than the former, and also not incur the costs of pollution, deforestation and community upheaval.¹³

HOW MUCH ARE WE WORTH?

The debt-based economy has social and individual effects. More growth requires the extraction of more resources, and among those resources is the energy of the people that the company employs. So, people get removed from the land and concentrated in ever-growing cities to form a pool of labour that can be drawn upon. Nomads, with their culture and knowledge, go to the wall. The daily and weekly work rhythm, rather than a biorhythm, is now established as the central principle of human life. People are based near their workplace, or in front of a screen, and lose touch with the Earth as a source of life and vitality (50% of the Earth's population now live in cities). That affects our understanding, our relationships and our health. This upheaval has spread with colonization, which validated seizing resources in other parts of the world, subjugating the indigenous population and getting them to work in conditions and for rates that wouldn't be tolerated in the home country. The economic system thereby acquired further resources, cheaper labour and new markets. Although the nation-based variety of colonialism has now largely passed away, contemporary global corporations create their empires along the same lines. The corporate logo has replaced the flag, but domination is still what it stands for.

Converting people into money has been good for the economy. And the economy has produced all kinds of commodities that our grandparents didn't have. However, although the economy has been presented as providing wealth to many, most of that wealth didn't stay with the people at the coalface (where their lungs rotted) or in the factory where they were bound to dangerous machinery, but with a small percentage of owners, entrepreneurs and shareholders. People certainly worked, and continue to work very hard, but it was only through rebellion and resistance over decades that the slums and sweatshops passed away and decent labour conditions were

established by law. It's not that basic integrity and fellow feeling were completely lacking in people, or played no part in improving working conditions, but these values are not part of the economic system. It also takes time and effort to bridle the system; it's not empathic, it's mechanical. From the point of view of the economy, the worker is a marketable asset to be employed for as little as possible, worked to the maximum and fired when he/she is no longer needed. Moreover, the chief beneficiaries of the global economy are in the minority.* And it's not because they have worked so much harder than anyone else: most wealth accrues through investment rather than productivity, more by inheritance and financial dealing than through the sweat of anyone's brow.¹⁴

Now, while an economy is a real-enough network of agreements and management, the current basis of it is financial rather than as a measure of human trade. It's about accumulating and dealing in money. Money itself is a handy trading tool, but it's only a token. In itself, it's worthless: you can't eat it, drink it, or shelter under it; it isn't nearly as useful as water. However, this token has become the single most powerful commodity: you can trade in it, invest in it and make even more money by doing so. Currently transactions in this financial economy amount to US\$1,500 trillion – compared to the international trading economy of US\$20 trillion. Mind-boggling figures. One way to summarize this is to say that over 90% of the money is bound up with the infrastructure, speculation and investment in the way that the economy is handled. To put it simply, money is being made out of the promise that the system of promises continues.

*A report by Oxfam in January 2017 produced the statistic that the wealthiest eight people in the world have as much credit or cash as the poorest 50% of the global population. The cause of this is systemic rather than personal: some of these eight are philanthropists who have spoken out against the system. The economy also supports such anomalies as there being millions of empty houses in Europe, while millions remain homeless. From the economy's point of view, construction companies make money, and desirable properties are a good investment. If you're wealthy, buy a mansion, leave it empty, then sit back and watch the money grow. In this scenario, dead inactive money, not trade, is the source of wealth.

What therefore started out as a promise, essentially an element in the immaterial collective, became a token to represent goods and has now become the owner of goods. You might say that as money grants status, access to higher education, the best medical services and legal assistance that will get you tax breaks, it is even *the* ultimate good. However, in the process of handling it, a few values go out the window (witness the frequent revelations of banks mishandling money by the billions), because in the money-trance, valuables become the new value. An effect of unbridled capitalism is that when the accumulation of money becomes the priority, mutuality will decline and one's world is stripped of the well-being afforded by sharing, love and innate self-worth. The only antidote that accumulation of wealth offers is extravagant spending.

SOCIAL EFFECTS

The accumulation of money grants entry into the financial market, where big deals can take place. However, doing just that affects all of us because society has to clean up if the deals fail: such as when there is a financial crash. So money isn't innately secure; it only becomes so because it's guaranteed by international agreement – at a level from which the average person is excluded. But with the promise of stability and prosperity, we give it our trust. We don't take stock of the fact that the economy runs on debt; handling all that is for specialists. But when from time to time speculation pushes past the level of debt repayment – as with the crash of 2008 – it isn't the money, the specialists or the system that feels the pain, it's the people who had taken out a mortgage or relied on an investment fund. Then – hey presto! – as the economy crashes, it suddenly converts money (or its absence) back into people who then have austerity measures imposed upon them – as with the Greek financial crisis which, over four years, drove an estimated 11,000 people to take their own lives.

As the media also has to make money to keep going, and as elections

require publicity and campaigns, access to big money influences who gets to govern a country. Consequently, the loan-debt basis of the economy transfers into society – especially as a primary function of government is the supervision of the economy. Accordingly, governments encourage big businesses by offering tax breaks, and the international banking system offers mechanisms such as offshore banking, private trusts, and ‘shell’ companies (businesses that have

Maritime Currents

- Oceans regulate the climate of the planet. If, for example, the melting of the Arctic causes it to discharge cold water south, this is predicted to ‘switch off’ the Gulf Stream that keeps northern Europe warm. They are also essential to the livelihoods and food security of billions of people around the globe. Shipping, tourism, transport, fisheries, oil, gas and renewable energy all depend on the sea. We take \$2.5 trillion out of the oceans through fishing and aquaculture, shipping and tourism annually. A recent estimate valued the oceans at \$24 trillion – if they are cared for and kept alive.
- Every year eight million tonnes of plastic goes into the ocean, the equivalent of five grocery bags filled with plastic for every foot of coastline in the world. In the UK alone, currently 13 billion plastic bottles are disposed of each year, of which only 3 billion are recycled.
- Polychlorinated biphenyls are also leaking into the ocean. These chemicals were widely used in electrical equipment but were finally banned in the 1980s after the full toxic impacts on people and wildlife were revealed: however, by now they have entered our air and water supplies. They cause cancers and suppress the

immune system, and do not break down in the environment.

- About 90% of coral reefs will disappear by 2050, the same year scientists have estimated there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 35% of all fish caught at sea die uneaten.

While an ecosystem of up to one million species is at risk, humans are also threatened: the plastics that end up in the ocean are consumed by fish that in turn end up on our plate and in our bodies. Scientists at Ghent University calculated that people who eat seafood ingest up to 11,000 tiny pieces of plastic per year.

- Against this backdrop, the UN has decided to launch a global campaign declaring war on ocean plastic. It is urging governments to pass plastic-reduction policy with a view to ending marine litter. Already a policy of putting a price on plastic bags at stores has substantially reduced their usage. A refundable fee applied to plastic bottles might have a similar effect.
- Several nations have designated large areas of the oceans as nature reserves. Although this move may prevent fishing and preserve wildlife to a degree, it can't halt the flow of contamination.

no assets but whose accounts are used to process money from their parent companies) so that big businesses can avoid paying the tax rate of the country that they operate in. In this way, the private sector can get to use the country's infrastructure and benefit from its policing and labour market with a less than fair contribution to the public domain.*

This private sector has been allowed to take over the provision of necessities of life such as water, health, education, transport and electricity. Big business benefits again. Global institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank oversee loans, debts and their repayment; they don't deal with the social, ethical or environmental issues that the economy creates, but they require governments to enact social policies that will favour the global economy. Accordingly, socio-political structures overseeing tens or hundreds of millions of people fall under the influence of an economic system that is concerned with the accumulation of imbalanced wealth and governed by remote and unelected authorities.

The idea may well be that the global economy is for everyone's benefit, but the process gives questionable results, as we see with the increase in the numbers of people who can't afford a home and who depend on food banks or food stamps for their daily meal. People are taking to the streets to protest against austerity budgets and monetarism. Their actions are deemed to be disruptive, but they are perhaps the only means available when people are faced with forces that they feel otherwise impotent to change. There is a personal loss too: the stress of living under such pressure leads to depression and neurosis.

COSTS TO THE INDIVIDUAL

*The tax rate in the USA is particularly lop-sided. In terms of income, between the 1960s and 1980s, the poorest 99.9% of the US population paid twenty-eight times as much as the richest 0.1%; by 2014, they were paying seventy-six times as much. This is due to a theory that deregulation, tax cuts and less welfare will 'trickle down' to bring around higher living standards for all. This hasn't happened. But in 2018, the federal government approved a further tax cut for the wealthier strata of society.¹⁵

The domination-exploitation mind-set affects a wide range of people, no matter what their attitude is towards trees and wolves. Firstly, there is the mental effect: the demands for higher productivity and efficiency push the minds of employees beyond the capacity to sustain balanced attention and well-being. A man in the grip of a psychological breakdown who came seeking refuge in the monastery where I live is a case in point. Bound to a desk and a screen in a high-pressure management job, he had begun hallucinating, hearing voices and even talking to people who weren't there. As he realized what was happening, another frightening fact came home: no one else in the workplace noticed or thought he was in any way unusual. Careless attention again: we are led to not notice or to discount the psychological damage and consequent addictions and breakdowns that then spill over from the individual to the society in general. Soap operas and TV shows, video fantasies and computerized presentations of nature create a non-participatory norm. You see nature on a screen; you don't smell it, handle it or shelter in it.

The abuse of nature also takes a toll on our bodies. From one point of view, human health seems to have improved over the past hundred years with some major diseases being abolished from our lives. However, although there was a marked improvement in health in the West from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, much of this came from improved sanitation and clean water; these don't so much require a huge technological leap forward as a prompt and wise response to human needs. As it was, these insanitary conditions were caused by cramming people into the insanitary living conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution; society got round to addressing the damage somewhat after the fact. The smoke of the nineteenth century left London in the 1950s when British factory chimneys grew taller – and sent their smog over to Sweden and Germany, to descend as 'acid rain'.

So it goes; it takes quite a while, but fifty or a hundred years after the poisons are dumped into the environment, laws get passed that force cleaner conditions. As with China's current rapid development:

first there's industrialization, and then an economic boom in which a percentage get very rich and others experience a more modest rise in 'living standards' (i.e. commodities). This is accompanied by intense work in mega-factories (from which some people attempt suicide to escape), smog-filled cities, mines that destroy the lungs, and inadequately supervised chemical waste.*

Reforms and legislation do slowly come around; or in China's case when the Party suddenly impose a ban on smoke emission, hence heating – as in Beijing. But it's ironic that one of the driving forces behind any clean-up is that poor health (= loss of working hours and increases in medical care) is bad for the economy.

While we must be grateful for the great breakthroughs of medical science, heart disease, obesity and diabetes are on the increase: all attributable to the junk food that is the most economically viable product. Could asthma be related to poor air? And what about the new diseases, allergies and neurological disorders? Could the amount of toxic waste in the water, air and the bodies of the animals we eat have something to do with that? Put another way, how could these poisons *not* have an effect? Why else is it that in 1900, one in thirty-three Americans developed cancer; less than a century later, despite a multi-billion-dollar pharmaceutical industry, the number had grown to one in three.¹⁷ Once you remove schizoid attention, the equation is a pretty simple one.

Overall, a survey of the human condition in the twenty-first century presents the conflicting images that one would expect from schizoid development. On the one hand, there are technological

*For example, while the World Health Organization sets limit of fine particles of dangerous air pollution at 25 micrograms per cubic metre, the US government considers 250/m³ hazardous. In Beijing in Jan 2014, the figure rose to 671/m³. A protocol in Shanghai shuts down schools and outdoor gatherings when a level of 450/m³ is reached.¹⁶ In Delhi in 2016, the figure rose to 999.

In addition to this, *Better Growth, Better Climate*, a report by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, estimates the number of premature deaths caused globally by air pollution to be 3.7 million, of which China's share in 2010 was 1.23 million, costing it between 9.7 and 13.2% of GDP.

advances that have transformed communication, travel and lifestyles within a couple of generations; on the other, there is an increasing amount of stress, heart disease, loneliness, addictions, eating disorders, allergies, and social dystopia. There are fewer places where one can meet safely in public without having to pay, and without the intrusion of the market. People have lost the streets, the village square, the common land. But if people don't meet and mingle in a relaxed and mutual way, what kind of society develops? And what kind of human? Depression is the number one life-inhibitor in the developed world (for those who aren't fully developed yet, it's only number two). Meanwhile, the myth: happy, well-groomed and sleek-bodied humans with their new cars and smartphones look down from billboards and screens. It takes me back to the memory of the restaurant pig, and causes me to question: who's getting chewed up? It's not just the pigs and cows.

VALUES OVER VALUABLES

To reiterate: our environment does not just consist of trees and whales; it's the interwoven world of the biosphere, the economy, society and our bodies and minds. It's all suffering from the same root problem – a short-term self-interest that supports careless attention. If you see it like this, it reduces the impotence; you see the paradigm of domination and exploitation and you address it wherever you can. Because the one right response, wherever, whenever, is to bring careful attention into the cosmos as you experience it.

What is natural, intrinsic and universal to human beings are not valuables: values issue from the mind and cannot get used up; valuables are materials that come from the Earth and are finite. Given this capacity, our responsibility has to be to develop values that will include and support as much of the cosmos as possible. Values: you name them – how about generosity, goodwill, truthfulness, reliability? It's not difficult to access the resources of our human nature; putting

them into practice takes work, but it is innately fulfilling. On a wider scale, giving value to harmony in our total environment will surely help us to strengthen and enrich our own lives. It will take us out of the sense of being an isolated, competitive self and into the harmony of being part of the cosmos. As Albert Einstein puts it:

A human being is part of the whole that we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This illusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for only the few people nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature.¹⁸



Nature is Dhamma

ONCE YOU SEE WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT, YOU REALLY WANT TO BE VERY, VERY CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT YOU DO AND SAY. YOU CAN HAVE NO INTENTION TO LIVE LIFE AT THE EXPENSE OF ANY OTHER CREATURE. ONE DOES NOT FEEL THAT ONE'S LIFE IS SO MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYONE ELSE'S. ONE BEGINS TO FEEL THE FREEDOM AND THE LIGHTNESS IN THAT HARMONY WITH NATURE RATHER THAN THE HEAVINESS OF EXPLOITATION OF NATURE FOR PERSONAL GAIN. WHEN YOU OPEN THE MIND TO THE TRUTH, THEN YOU REALIZE THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR. WHAT ARISES PASSES AWAY, WHAT IS BORN DIES, AND IS NOT SELF – SO THAT OUR SENSE OF BEING CAUGHT IN AN IDENTITY WITH THIS HUMAN BODY FADES OUT. WE DON'T SEE OURSELVES AS SOME ISOLATED, ALIENATED ENTITY LOST IN A MYSTERIOUS AND FRIGHTENING UNIVERSE. WE DON'T FEEL OVERWHELMED BY IT, TRYING TO FIND A LITTLE PIECE OF IT THAT WE CAN GRASP AND FEEL SAFE WITH, BECAUSE WE FEEL AT PEACE WITH IT. THEN WE HAVE MERGED WITH THE TRUTH.¹⁹

AJAHN SUMEDHO

EMPATHY OR IGNORANCE: THE NEED TO CHOOSE

When we attend to our values, we might begin by reflecting on the Buddha's exhortation: *'Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings'* (Snp. 149). This is not just because kindness is universal and simple,

but because it focuses us directly on the quality of heart that has enabled us to survive and grow. We are born as empathic beings – we’re hard-wired for it with mirror-neurons in our brains – and our success as a species has come from being able to operate as a collective. So a focus on goodwill brings us out of the divisions of nationality, social status, and political systems to connect more directly with a value that can include others. Development of that empathic sense is an aspect of Buddhist ‘mind-cultivation’, and its aim is to develop that sense in a widening field to include all other living beings. The more inclusive the cosmos, the greater its validity. And the awakening fact is that this cultivation is also deeply enjoyable.

This inclusive focus is the mode within which the Buddha, prior to his enlightenment, gave careful attention to his mind. Wisely reflecting on their origins and effects, he distinguished which thoughts were *‘for my welfare, for the welfare of others and leading to nibbāna’* (M.19), and by withdrawing from thoughts that went against those criteria, initiated the process that led to his awakening. Subsequently, his life was an offering of teachings that have benefitted many over thousands of years.

Note the focus, especially as introspection may seem like it’s only about improving yourself. Well, that’s part of it, but ‘self’ isn’t an isolated entity, but one facet of the cosmos. To take it slowly: in everyday language, ‘nibbāna’ refers to the ending of suffering, stress, need, lack – all summed up by the word *‘dukkha’*. The path to the ending of *dukkha* is through the elimination of greed, hatred and delusion by clearing ignorance or ‘wrong-seeing’ (*avijjā*). Bear in mind that ‘ignorance’ doesn’t imply a lack of information, but rather a lack of careful attention to the whole picture. As in the case of someone peering through a magnifying glass at the details of a rifle that is pointing at them, with ignorance we can see some details with great precision yet miss the important meaning. And the meaning that gives us greatest value is that our presence is involved with our

every interaction. As our presence is crucial and valuable, it follows on that we need to learn to respond from a values-based presence rather than in accord with a system.

Indeed, as this gives us self-respect, and clarity, why not? 'Why not' is because the systems are powerful and they give rise to the carelessness of 'this doesn't matter' or the impotence of 'everyone else does this' – a blur and a fobbing off of responsibility. This logic rests on the notion of being a self that is disconnected from the rest of the cosmos. This notion is actually a dysfunction, as well as being a source of loneliness, competition, prejudice, and the domination-exploitation view. It ignores the natural truth that we can only physically exist dependent on the Earth's resources, and that we depend on other human beings for birth, weaning, moral and intellectual education and friendship.

Because it is associated with separation, this ignorance is accompanied by a sense that something is missing. We may well feel bored, lonely, or that life is meaningless; and probably try to fill that sense of vacuity with sights, sounds, tastes, etc., or assume, 'I'm not doing enough, get busy.' However, the experience of lack isn't eliminated like that. Having interesting things and being successful only fills us for a while: people with plenty of these still get depressed, whereas people with careful attention can live happily without sensory stimulation. Ignorance doesn't know this. Instead it supports the gratification instinct (*taṇhā* = 'thirst' or 'craving'). Thirst searches for more, or to hold onto what it imagines provides satisfaction. And because this thirst operates through careless attention, ignorance doesn't notice that thirst breeds more thirst rather than satisfaction. Consequently, *taṇhā* conditions 'clinging' (*upadāna*) – the instinct to accumulate things and be in control of life.

Clinging fixates; it holds onto instincts and impulses. If thirst is for taste, clinging wants to be the mouth. If thirst is to be attractive, clinging tries to be the owner of the thing that creates that impression.

I.4 The Noble Eightfold Path

Sammā-ditthi: right view

To be aware of living in the realm of cause and effect and accepting the responsibility of that.

Sammā-sankappa: right attitude

To cultivate attitudes and motivations that check sense-indulgence and cruelty and promote values-based simplicity.

Sammā-vācā: right communication (speech, writing)

To avoid speech and writing that is: a) false; b) divisive and tale-bearing; c) harsh and abusive; d) mindless and lacking in usefulness.

Sammā-kammanto: right physical action

To avoid actions that destroy or harm sentient creatures; that appropriate what is not one's own; that sexually misuse others; that spread bad communication; that cause intoxication and loss of mental clarity.

Sammā-ajjivo: right livelihood

To avoid a lifestyle that entails the taking of life, theft, deceit, sexual abuse, trafficking of people, drugs or alcohol; also to distribute one's wealth to one's dependents, those in need and worthy causes.

Sammā-vāyāmo: right effort

To persist with all of the above; to maintain these standards and repair them with understanding when they are broken; to cultivate inner clarity and calm.

Sammā-sati: right mindfulness

To bear in mind any aspect of the Dhamma, especially the factors in this list; to sustain a clear awareness of bodily sensations and mental states with the aim of understanding how unskillful states and hindrances occur and cease.

Sammā-samādhi: right concentration of heart, right unification

To bring around stillness and ease to the extent that mental hindrances (such as restlessness, anxiety, passion and aversion) cease and consequently body and mind are suffused with a pleasant and replenishing energy. To use this as a resource in its own right and as a basis for refining one's aims, understanding and lifestyle.

Even though the feeling that the sleek car or eye-catching clothes are held to create is actually created by the mind and is of short duration, ignorance obscures that. So clinging goes against the natural way of things. Clinging sees experience in terms of gain and loss, and fears the waning of what it adheres to; nature is an organic whole in which elements are born and pass away and new elements arise. Clinging believes in systems and structures; nature is affective and responsive. Clinging tries to control; in nature, everything participates in a

process. Clinging fixates and says, 'Without this you'll be miserable, a failure and everything will fall apart'; nature says: 'Everything arises and passes, learn to adapt.' Clinging fears nature, which it tries to dominate; it creates an ego-centred view, and says there is no alternative. But in nature there's always some alternative: creatures adapt, rivers change course.

For us, the alternative lies in how we cultivate our awareness (*citta*) – within which are the intelligences of 'mind' or reasoning, and 'heart', an intelligence that feels, responds, has motivation, and also produces images and intuitions. Considerable discord and dysfunction can occur in this domain, to the point of neurosis and even psychosis. But if mind and heart are well-integrated and based on values, these intelligences work together as a unity, to apprehend, respond to, and manage what arises in sense-consciousness. Those perceptions and responses themselves get responded to, organized to create an 'internal' domain, with an orientation and aim. Through careful attention to suitable aims and responses, this internal domain can be a very fulfilling experience:

It is natural (*dhammatā*) that non-regret arises in a virtuous person, one whose behaviour is virtuous ... It is natural that joy arises in one who is without regret ... that rapture arises in one who is virtuous ... that the body of one who is rapturous is tranquil ... that one tranquil in body feels pleasure ... that the mind of one feeling pleasure is concentrated ... that one who is concentrated knows and sees things as they really are ... (A.10: 2)

So when the internal domain is pleasantly settled in the here and now, we can see the external more clearly and relate to it through the virtue and presence that we've cultivated. But when there is ignorance, and careless attention that ignores values, there is a narrow 'self-view' that needs to hold on, to control and to gain. So clinging arises, and the enjoyment of an openness and empathy gets replaced with mentally created possibilities of gain and loss,

of control and permanent security. All this creates a momentum that the Buddha called '*bhava*' – translated as 'becoming' or 'about to be'. This becoming imparts a sense of temporal continuity and solidity: 'I will be, I was; therefore I am.' But as future is expectation and past a memory, who are we now? The mind forgets to look, because clinging and becoming dangle a future of wealth, prestige, security and happiness in front of its eyes – and when those mirages are threatened, fear, violence and despair get evoked. So the blur continues.

Fortunately, ignorance is an affliction that can be cured; it isn't a total reality. When we see things as they really are, we recognize the interdependent nature of life, and that means there is a natural sense of mutual respect, friendliness, and moral clarity. We also realize how ignorance gets triggered by passion, and vice versa, and how passion gets stimulated by holding on to the feelings that arise with sense-contact. Now that doesn't *have* to happen – if one sustains careful attention and reviews the nature of sensory feeling and the results of passion.

Training in the capacity for clarity opens up further options. A trained mind can step back from its thoughts and moods and be clear about them. A clear mind knows that impressions pass, so it gets free from reactivity and compulsions – and thereby loses the clinging and the attachments that say 'I have to have, or do, this.' Touching into its freedom in this way, it experiences inner contentment. Clinging is disrupted and a balanced awareness replaces the views that are the cause of suffering for oneself and others. This is the training and the result that Buddhists call 'Dhamma', an alignment to true human nature.

RIGHT VIEW, MUTUALITY AND ITS INTEGRATION

Because our minds generate the collective mentality, subtle qualities like perception have powerful effects on the world. An effective

summary on this was delivered by Ven. Bhikkhu Payutto, the most eminent scholar-monk in Thailand today, in his address to the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. Talking on 'A Buddhist Solution for the 21st Century', he outlined three perceptions that he saw as the source of the social and environmental problems that face humanity.²⁰ These are:

The perception that humankind is separate from nature, and that it must control, conquer or manipulate nature according to human desires.

The perception that fellow humans are not our fellows; the tendency to focus on the differences between us rather than the common ground.

The perception that happiness is dependent on gaining and keeping an abundance of material possessions.

In this review, the crux of the problem isn't in technology or science. It's a matter of wrong perception. And what is needed is right perception or 'right view' (*sammā ditṭhi*). Right view is the foundation of the Buddhist Path. It is frequently described like this:

There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed; the fruit or result of good or bad actions; there is this world, and another world; there is mother, father, beings who are reborn spontaneously; there are good and virtuous recluses and brahmins in this world who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world. (M.117)

This view is a direct alignment: to acknowledge that we are born and raised thanks to the bodies and living intelligence of others; that our actions are made meaningful by participating in the environment of self and others. And that there is a world beyond that built out of sense-input – a world of values is the most obvious expression of this. So our lived-in world isn't just a bunch of commodities and rivals. Right view sees that we're involved in the world in a way that encourages responsibility rather than entitlement. We receive a gift, therefore we give back in terms of skilful action. Right view is to be

acted upon. Hence right attitude (or right motivation) and actions of body and speech, and consequently right livelihood, arise. To sustain and act on that right view is wisdom.

Here, bhikkhu, a wise person of great wisdom does not intend for his own affliction, for the affliction of others, or for the affliction of both. Rather when he thinks, he thinks only of his own welfare, the welfare of others, the welfare of both, and the welfare of the whole world. It is in this that one is a wise person of great wisdom. (A.4: 187)

Dhamma-practice is then about integrating right view into a way of life that is based on mutuality: 'to others as to myself'. The Buddha encouraged this through the cultivation of generosity and sharing (*dāna*), of moral integrity (*sīla*), and of renunciation or moderating the pull of the senses (*nekkhamma*).*

Generosity is the easiest and happiest way to enter the experience of mutuality. It defies the logic of greed by accessing the happiness of the heart when it is bringing forth rather than holding on. Morality is the principle of acknowledging that others count as much as I do. It grants respect for self and others, and the qualities of a mind that has no deceit, vindictiveness or remorse show us that something valuable arises when we value others.

Renunciation is the process of separating wants from needs. Wants will always increase, but as you give careful attention to the destructive influence of craving and clinging, and the calm of letting go, your material needs come down to food, shelter, clothes and health care; if your ethical standards are such that you live in a trusting and sharing relationship with others, those needs can be met. For one who meditates as well, the process of clearing the internal environment will result in ease, joy and friendliness: enough to make life rich. As we can all produce ethics, kindness and wisdom

*e.g. at D.5: 29.

at no cost, without pollution and with happiness as a result, this is of significance to the environment as a whole.

THE COMMONS: INTEGRAL LIVING

The collective aspect of this Path is the commons; that is, a group of people who are in a values-based relationship, and who pool their resources. For such a lifestyle to come around, there has to be a sense of sharing and moral integrity that supports trust and respect. Then as we trust and feel secure, we can let go of owning and holding so much on an individual basis. Apart from the consequent reduction of economic stress, there is an increase in terms of ease and fellowship; more time for creativity, exploration, meditation – or whatever strengthens your access to and enjoyment of subjective experience. It's the stuff that we all want, but which money can't guarantee.

This model has been a constant theme in human societies. In the pre-industrial era, people belonged to collectives in which a visitor had to be offered food and shelter. The commons centred around a rightly practising Buddhist monastic community (sangha) still exemplifies this. In a monastery, food, accommodation and teaching are all offered free of charge to those who abide by the moral and communal standards. Even without verbal instruction, the atmosphere in itself discharges stress. It allows people to come out of the 'this costs that; compete/earn/deserve' view, and a natural opening of the heart occurs. As such, the monastery generates free-will support. In my experience, a significant number of people relate to the monastery not as a meditation centre, but through offering food, or coming to help out with the work. And although people may visit and meet in the monastery, the community extends beyond its boundaries to networks that, for example, produced this book. There are no wages. This is the economy of a spiritual commons: sharing, integrity and gratitude replace gain and debt; hearts and minds are uplifted; everyone wins.

Yet it's not the case that money isn't involved: monasteries pay bills. It's just that it's not clung to; no one owns anything of significance and no one gains money through holding its land. So I don't have a house, a car, or a bank account, but I am granted access to communal resources that meet my needs. And I share what comes my way. Doing what my fellow monks and nuns do, I share my understanding willingly and free of charge. I wouldn't want to charge a fee, because it would define an act of love by a monetary sum. Instead there is the enjoyment of being of service to others; thus mutuality is sensed and community is developed. And although the monastic life places an emphasis on renunciation, this is more than compensated for by the strengthening and fulfilment of the heart. Then renunciation is no more ascetic than taking a weight off your back; it means there's less to manage, worry about and get attached to.

As commitment to the monastic life also entails abstaining from entertainment and sexual activity, it's not a norm that many would wish to follow. But in its strategy of widening the collective mentality, it's not unusual; the world is full of volunteers – especially in the medical, environmental and educational fields – who gain meaning, vigour and learning from offering service in cooperative ventures. To widen the focus even further: our mothers didn't charge us for the womb, milk and nursing. I would say a love of voluntary and meaningful service is basic to being human. Our heart's basis is empathy: you don't have to be a Buddhist, or that enlightened, to experience it. The key is to set up a human environment that supports this sense of mutuality.

In industrial societies, the imprint of the commons has been reduced through the loss of common land, the loss of street markets, the reduction in the open meeting places such as village halls, the absence of a shared locale. It has been replaced by the dislocated commons of the Internet, which, while it greatly facilitates sharing, doesn't entail the responsibility that being located on a land with

neighbours does. Monasteries and their like provide location and mingling in real time, especially when they're situated in land that allows people to breathe and move freely. The very presence of nature, and the settling into a more embodied and less electronic life facilitates their message. As social economist Charles Eisenstein comments:

When I ask people what is missing most from their lives, the most common answer is 'community.' But how can we build community when its building blocks – the things we do for each other – have all been converted into money? Community is woven from gifts. Unlike money or barter transactions, in which there are no obligations remaining after the transaction, gifts always imply future gifts. When we receive, we owe; gratitude is the knowledge of having received and the desire to give in turn. But what is there now to give? Not the necessities of life, not food, shelter, or clothing, not entertainment, not stories, not health care: everyone buys these. Hence the urge to get away from it all, to return to a more self-sufficient life where we build our own houses and grow our own food and make our own clothes, in community. Yet while there is value in this movement, I doubt that many people will start doing things the hard way again just in order to have community ... and it springs from the fact that money does not meet many of our needs at all. Very important needs go unmet today, and money, because of its impersonal nature, is incapable of meeting them. The community of the future will.²¹

A LEARNING CURVE?

I apologize if the statistics have had an oppressive effect. Managers like numbers. But to adopt another perspective, we are learning, somewhat late in the day, and we do adapt. This is human nature. Values have fed our societies and developed over the centuries. Overall, the values-standard that we now see as the baseline (whatever the number of occasions that individual entities deviate from it) is

one of justice, compassion and non-brutality to ourselves and other creatures. Public executions were a popular form of entertainment in eighteenth-century Europe, but the killing of one lion in Zimbabwe in 2015 resulted in international public outcry. Three hundred years ago, people were burned alive on suspicion of deviation from a religious viewpoint, but nowadays we have charities to help the poor or needy, and there are many organizations that deal specifically with the welfare of the biosphere. People are participating in demonstrations and signing petitions urging governments to cut back on exploitation. Governments are responding with environmental protocols. Major investment funds, such as the world's largest (that of Norway) are divesting from fossil fuels. Investment in renewable sources of energy (solar, wind and water) now exceeds that committed to fossil fuels. In fact, wherever change in terms of a healthier relationship to nature and the environment is taking place, you'll also see signs of ethics and generosity and sharing. It's natural. The baseline of our collective integrity has risen and continues to rise. So a fully effective alternative approach to the environment has to tap into this natural human resource. And it is through its teachings on sharing, morality and renunciation, and its practical means of cultivating careful attention, that Buddhism can contribute towards a resolution of our environmental crisis.

Above all, we have a responsibility to be fully informed; to keep our eyes open so that we can make clear choices in terms of what to eat, what to buy, who to associate with, how to occupy ourselves, and who to vote for. As individuals, it may not seem that there's much we can do. But we can meet and share and help each other and participate in a positive spiral. And the bottom line of any cultivation of truth is to choose to not look away. *'There is suffering, a cause, a cessation and a Path to the ceasing of suffering.'* The Buddha reminds us that our greatest gift and responsibility is to keep awake to it all.



Embodied Awareness

Sit in a way that is centred on just sitting. That is, settle fully into what's immediately underneath you and use that for balance and uprightness. If you can, sit with your legs crossed in the 'lotus' position; this allows maximum opening in the pelvic floor and support from the legs. If that's not possible, plant your body on the seat of a chair (avoid leaning back on a backrest as this will lessen the grounding effect that comes through the lower body); then spread your thighs wide for support. In either posture, relax your belly while lifting slightly through the abdominal muscles so that the chest is opened. In this way, weight is transferred down your spine and into the floor, rather than resting on your belly. Take your time and adjust that posture until your body settles into it.

Get a feel for the whole body – not as an assembly of parts – through widening your awareness to include the entire form as one unit. Sense the ground beneath you and the space around you; let your body open and feel comfortable with that. When that state feels settled, pick up the overall rhythmic experience of your body swelling and relaxing with the in- and out-breath.

Let your breathing happen; feel what you can of it in your body without straining your attention. If you don't feel the breathing very fully, just attune to the sensations in your body and, sustaining the wide focus that includes your entire body, sense the centre of that experience (probably your belly or your chest). As that gets comfortable, gradually widen from the centre to the edge of your

felt boundaries. Soften around your eyes, sweep your attention down through your hands and feet, letting a sense of ease extend throughout. Cultivate the sense of being in this comfortable space, and let your mind appreciate that.

Your mind will still probably push or wriggle or jump – or get forceful in an effort to stay with your body. Step back from the reasons and the narratives that pop up, and be aware of the mental movements: notice ‘pushing’, ‘wriggling’, ‘jumping’ (or ‘sliding’, ‘drifting’, ‘sinking’) – try to picture the movement ‘like a dog straining on a leash’, ‘like a fly on a window pane’, and so on. Use that act of noting as a tether, then apply the question ‘How does my body feel right now?’ or ‘How does this mental activity affect my body?’ or ‘What’s it like when I breathe out at this time?’ Open, feel how your body is and settle in that. In such ways keep returning your attention to an embodied centre. Don’t create any targets or goals; note and loosen your hold on even those mental creations. Just keep returning awareness into your body in the present.

If your embodied centre and its periphery both feel relatively comfortable, the rhythm of breathing will deepen and extend that sense. Feel the effect of the breath-flow in your skin – the slight tingling and stretching. Imagine your breath can flow through your skin out into the space around you, and in from the space around you. Be with this for a few minutes; or as long as you like.

Notice the mind as it is, as moving mental stuff, rather than a single entity. Inquire: ‘Is there a single unified entity in all this?’ ‘Who, or what is aware of the body? And who is aware of emotional stuff as it happens?’ However, avoid creating more mental stuff with verbal explanations; just use these questions to point and arouse your awareness.

•••

If you’d like to, you can continue with a standing posture, or do so at another time. With this, plant your feet evenly on the ground, soften in your knees and backside so that the legs feel pliable and aren’t

locked. Then feel the balance. As you get that, relax a little in your belly and sense your spine as an extension of the upright stance. Do this gradually until the entire body from the crown of the head down to the feet is attuned to the balance of standing. Open your throat and relax your hands and face, especially in the jaw, forehead and around the eyes.

Turn a little, feel what happens in the body as pressures and slight stretches occur and balance is retained. Feel your body turning easily in the space around you. ‘What is around me is open, non-obstructive and non-intrusive.’ Enjoy that. Whatever moods or energies arise, don’t plunge into them or block them; instead experience them as you would the random sounds around you or the sensations in your body. Let any movement subside into stillness and balance.

Inquire, gently, as in the sitting position: ‘Who is aware of the body? Who is aware of the mind?’


• • •

You might like to take this way of experiencing into walking. But if you do, then let go of the idea of getting anywhere. Find a quiet place, in your house, or in a natural or at least peaceful location; then focus on standing and, keeping your attention mostly on your upper body, relax your shoulders and let your legs carry you through the space around you. It’s like walking waist- or chest-deep in calm water. Your immediate environment is sensitive to you, and you are sensitive to it. Remember, it’s important to get your upper body to relax and for your waist to flex naturally with the walking. Your arms should swing slightly and naturally beside your body. Open your throat and keep your hands and face relaxed. Maintain a soft focus with your eyes, not looking at anything in particular; let them be gently receptive.

With this you’ll get an entry to your total environment – within and around you – in the calm vehicle of your embodied mind. The

environment is changing, multi-faceted and gives rise to a range of sensed experience. Don't linger long on any detail, but be the space through which things pass. Contemplate it all: the arising and changes of the sounds of traffic or wind, water or human voices, bodily senses, thoughts and emotions (including any responses to them) – all as an unbroken whole, a multi-sense 'symphony'. How do you feel in all this? You're really not separate from what's happening. Find your balance within that.

'Who listens to all this?' 'Who is aware of the world?'



Part II

Refuge and Roots

ALL THAT COULD BE DONE BY A TEACHER OUT OF EMPATHY HAS BEEN DONE BY ME.
HERE ARE ROOTS OF TREES, HERE ARE EMPTY PLACES, MEDITATE, BHIKKHUS, LEST YOU
REGRET IT LATER.

(M.19: 27)

... THE THAI WORD FOR NATURE, *DHAMMACHAT*, COULD BE ROUGHLY TRANSLATED AS
'THE BIRTHPLACE OF TRUTH.' EMBEDDED IN THE LANGUAGE IS THE IDEA THAT NATURE
IS WHERE WE CAN SEE THE DHAMMA, BOTH IN TERMS OF HOW THE TEACHINGS DISPLAY
THEMSELVES IN THE WORLD AS WELL AS IN THE NATURAL TRUTHS THE BUDDHA
POINTED TO. IN BUDDHISM WE LOOK AT THE CYCLES OF NATURE THAT ARE OUTSIDE
OF OURSELVES BUT ALSO INSIDE. THAT'S WHAT MEDITATION PRACTICE IS ALL ABOUT,
LOOKING AT HOW WE EXPERIENCE OUR OWN NATURE – THE WAYS WE LIVE AND
BREATHE, EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS, CREATE SUFFERING OR LIVE IN HARMONY.¹

AJAHN PASANNO



The Buddha: the Space Beneath the Tree

LIVING NATURALLY IS NEAR TO NIBBĀNA MORE SO THAN LIVING SCIENTIFICALLY, BECAUSE NIBBĀNA IS ALREADY THE HIGHEST NATURE: NATURALLY CLEAN, CLEAR AND CALM. LIVE NATURALLY; IT HELPS MAKE US CLEAN, CLEAR, AND CALM MORE EASILY.

WHEN WE SPEAK OF THE LORD BUDDHA, NEVER FORGET THAT HE WAS BORN OUTDOORS, LIVED OUTDOORS, HAD A HUT WITH AN EARTHEN FLOOR...²

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU

HUMAN AND IMAGE

Nowadays, the sage whom we call ‘the Buddha’ is generally represented by the image of a human being, of composed deportment and with somewhat androgynous features, wearing a robe. That wasn’t the case in the early centuries of Buddhism, when the Awakened One was recollected by a number of images, such as footprints or a memorial stupa. Perhaps the most evocative was of an empty seat beneath a tree. Nowadays, if you go to Bodhi Gaya, where his awakening is said to have taken place, that’s what you’ll see: a large fig tree, the Bodhi (‘Awakening’) tree, whose leafy

boughs extend over a plain slab of stone. This spot is held to be the site of the Buddha's transformative realization. Together the images remind us of the two-fold character of awakening and the Awakened One: that which can be seen, which is rooted in the earth and yet reaches out to offer shelter to many; and that which we can't see, but is detected in terms of open, imperturbable space. Throughout his many years of wandering and teaching, the Buddha conveyed that dual nature seamlessly. It's as if he never left the awakening seat.

The person, Gotama the Buddha, is known to us through various accounts. Of these, I will generally refer to the earliest records we have, in accord with the logic that the closer the origin of the transmitted material is to the life of the man, the more accurate it will be. The orally-transmitted record (texts didn't get laid down until the beginning of the Common Era) dates from within the first hundred years after the Buddha's decease; and most scholars now place him in the 5th century BCE. But the early record contains little biographical material, except that which frames his discourses (sutta: 'threads'), dialogues, stories and exhortations. His followers were focused on the teachings, and he wasn't interested in personal history.

But as a representation of awakened power, the Buddha is lavishly depicted. In the suttas he has supernormal powers, being able to fly through the air and visit celestial abodes; and even on this earth he associates with spirits and deities (*deva*) who show him respect.* In the later texts he is master of the manifest universe with rays of light streaming from his forehead to illuminate the cosmos of Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas. So he is also an image. More earthy, but also of myth-forming potency, are the accounts that the Buddha himself gave of his previous lives. In fables that appear in various suttas and also form an entire anthology – the *Jātakā* – he presents his mind's career in terms of accounts of focused generosity, truthfulness,

*In this he is not alone. In Buddhist literature, even unenlightened monks and nuns dialogue with spirits; and in Asia to this day, masters are reported as being in touch with spirits (good and bad), and mediating between them and the human realm.

patience, and self-sacrifice. As a king, he cultivated generosity and loving-kindness; as a minister, he counselled the same; and as a yogi, or as an animal, he gave up his life for the welfare of others. One sterling example comes from his birth as a king of monkeys. In this *Jātakā* story, he uses his body to bridge a river, so that his people can escape from hunters by running over him – even though this breaks his back.

Another story, embedded in the *Kutadanta Sutta* (D.5: 11), sees him as a minister advising his king on how to rid the realm of a plague of thieves:

‘Suppose Your Majesty were to think: “I will get rid of this plague of robbers by executions and imprisonment” ... the plague would not be properly ended. Those who survived would later harm Your Majesty’s realm.’

Instead the minister recommends the distribution of grain, fodder, capital and proper living wages. As a consequence,

‘Your Majesty’s revenues will be great, the land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves, and the people, with joy in their hearts, will play with their children, and will dwell in open houses.’

Fable it may be, but rather than modelling righteous war on evil (an action that doesn’t address its causes), it exemplifies a Buddha-mind’s response: to offer a long-term strategy, one based on trust in human nature.

This archetype of the male as non-violent protector, bestower and given to self-sacrifice is therefore seen as the role model for the male Buddhist, just as the female is seen as nourishing, supportive and giving careful attention to the details of home management: a perfect combination for any environment.

After a few hundred years, attempts at a visual representation of the noble and supernatural qualities of the Buddha generated a figure with abnormal features of mystic significance (such as a small mound on top of the head, sometimes with a flame or an aura rising

II.1

The Four Noble Truths

- That there is suffering, that there is dissatisfaction, or a sense of loss, in life. This manifests as the separation and consequent struggle that occurs with birth; separation from the loved and agreeable, deterioration through age and sickness, one's death and that of others; and the inability to achieve an enduring state of happiness and ease.
- That suffering is of a causal nature, that our dis-ease occurs, wells up and is not an absolute eternal state of affairs. It can be seen as an experience triggered by wanting to have, wanting to become something or be in some state, and wanting to avoid the facts of existence.
- That suffering can cease, that through calmly and clearly giving up these forms of wanting, the heart's suffering can cease.
- That there is a Path of practice that leads to the cessation of suffering, that through our own experiencing of clarity and integrity we can bring around the cessation of suffering; that this practice forms a Path in life, the Eightfold Noble Path (see Panel 1.3).

from it as a sign of his supernormal wisdom and awakened energy). So it is: when we enter the field of meaning, image, fable and myth arise. They sustain the collective domain. And although the way the mythic Buddha – the figure who appears in the literature, art and temples of Asia – is shaped is in accord with a culture's expression of veneration, all accounts are consistent in presenting a person of unwavering resolve, peerless depth and steady compassion. 'For the welfare of gods and humans' is one of the epithets associated with the Buddha; 'impeccable in conduct and understanding' and 'Knower of the Worlds' are others. They make a clear point: an Awakened One pervades the entire cosmos with benevolent awareness.

Also that this cosmos knew and acknowledged him: one account has it that the pivotal moment in his process of awakening occurred when he extended the fingers of his right hand down to touch the Earth and call its goddess to testify to the trials he had passed through over lifetimes and the virtues (*pāramī*) he had consequently developed. Rising up in response and wringing her hair, she sent forth a flood that swept away Mara (the Satan of the suttas) and his demon host – who, in true demon fashion, were doing their best to confound

and undermine his efforts. In those days, the cosmos wasn't flat and secular, but a lively and multi-dimensional reality.

Of all locales, this Awakened One, in as far as he allowed for preferences, resorted to woodlands. In fact, as you read the discourses, there are woodlands everywhere. 'The Blind Man's Grove', 'The Squirrels' Feeding Ground', 'The Gabled Hall in the Great Wood', 'Nigrodha's Park', 'Jeta Grove', 'Bamboo Grove', are the names of the venues of many discourses. He was also a man of the earth, familiar with the animals and plants of his native environment: his discourses are full of similes that employ monkeys, jackals, deer, lions, bulls, elephants, hawks, quails, and snakes, as well as jasmine, rose-apple, creepers, and grasses. There are 168 references to the natural world in one set of discourses alone.³ He also knew the healing power of plants: the Books of the Discipline (Vinaya-pitaka) indicate numerous roots and leaves that may be used by his forest-dwelling disciples. This communing with nature was scientific as well as mythic.

So naturally enough, '*Tathāgata** *prefer empty places*' was his comment when a donor offered to provide the facilities for a monastery; but when the donor then purchased land that happened to be just outside Savatthi, the capital city of Kosala, the Buddha accepted it. Not only that: he subsequently spent twenty rain-season retreats (*Vassa*) there. It was an ideal situation in which he could make his teachings available to the king and queen, the townsfolk and of course his gone-forth '*samaṇa*' disciples. But after the *Vassa*, he would be gone, steadily walking through the forests, visiting towns and villages for alms, offering teachings and meditating in seclusion. Forest and town; *samaṇas* and kings; gods and humans; teaching and profound silence: the Awakened One knew these worlds, and moved through them without attachment... Or perhaps it's better to say they moved through him.

*The term 'Tathāgata' is how the Buddha referred to himself as an Awakened One. The term means literally 'Thus Gone' or 'Thus Come'; it can also mean 'one of truth, who sees things as they really are.' The term refers to the undistorted knowing, the bias-free mind of an awakened being.

A FOREST TRAINING

The axis of the Buddha's life – birth, awakening and death – was the tree. It was under a tree, in Lumbini Grove in what is now Nepal, that he as 'Bodhisatta'* (the Buddha-to-be) first drew breath; they say his mother gave birth standing up; stone tablets depict her holding onto a tree as the baby emerges from her side. Being the son of a local maharaja, he was subsequently confined to the palace. The accounts say that his father, fearing that his son might renounce the kingdom, kept him entertained with different palaces, fine clothes, minstrels and dancers; he also arranged a marriage for his son. But the young Gotama was not interested in domestic life, its trappings and responsibilities: it took thirteen years for the couple to produce a child, and then, feeling that he had provided the kingdom with an heir, and after long negotiations with his parents, the Bodhisatta left home on a spiritual quest.

He wasn't the only one to do so. From before records began, young men (and a few women) of the Vedic society had given up their homes, along with their place in the intricately woven cosmos of the collective, to go forth. Although the parents often resisted and grieved over the loss of their heirs and marriageable daughters – with all the connections that their children would bring to the family – the collective did acknowledge and value the going-forth. Going-forth was the remit of seers and recluses, and their act of renunciation caused them to accumulate spiritual power. And it was to the forests that those gone-forth went.

The jungle was the place where the mind, removed from the cares of domestic duties and suspended in that uncertain abiding, would reset itself and focus on topics like the nature of self, and of the universe, and liberation from the rounds of birth and death. As far

*In the later texts, there are many 'Bodhisattvas' – beings who while possessing the capacity for awakening, delay entering nirvana in order to offer help to the world. In the early texts there is only one 'Bodhisatta': Gotama.

as the society at large was concerned, the spiritual power granted by renunciation was multiplied by *tapas* (austerities), or by associating with the demons and gods who frequented the wilderness. Such association required the recluse to achieve the psychic mastery to enter the supernatural areas of the cosmos or otherwise deal with these spirits. Kings, chiefs and headsmen all recognized that protection from evil forces and a fortunate alignment to the cosmos would accrue as a consequence of the presence of these recluses. Accordingly, groves near the major towns were set aside for wandering seers to frequent at their leisure. Kings, gentry and the occasional sophist would visit such groves to make offerings, receive teachings or debate with these wanderers.

These gone-forth wanderers were a loosely-knit fellowship ('clansmen' was how they referred to themselves) who might find a teacher and become one of his disciples for a while; either that or they might wander in small companies with no guide other than the aspects of nature that arose in their awareness. These might be a rotting corpse, a lion, an elephant trampling unstopably through the undergrowth; or the rhythms of one's own breathing; or the changes and interactions of it all – while the great trees formed a shelter from the elements.

Given the part they played in fathoming and managing the potentially fatal forces of nature and supernature, it is no wonder that the term 'Refuge' would be applied to the Awakened One and his Teaching, and, as it crystallized around him, the Sangha, the Order of *samaṇa* disciples.

An Order? Since these forest-dwelling recluses had rejected social convention, it was remarkable that the Buddha was able to gather them into any kind of coherent collective, let alone a self-governing fellowship. Most of their training in behaviour (*śīladhamma*) had been associated with living attuned to the wilderness. As well as acquiring resilience, they had to be quick-witted: Refuge or no, life in the jungle was no place for fools. One had to know how to step quietly to not startle a wild buffalo; how to avoid a pit, or a not to disturb a sleeping snake or an ant's nest; and grow fearlessly confident that

one's sending forth mental intentions of goodwill could calm a wild elephant. Then the simple requisites had to be acquired: to find a spot within walking distance of a village for alms-food; to obtain enough cloth for meagre clothing – rags from the winding sheet of a corpse were considered adequate; then to learn what leaves and fruit could be used as medicines; and perhaps during the monsoon rains, how to lash together a temporary shelter. Otherwise the dwelling was at the foot of a tree or in a charnel ground. Other belongings would just get in the way and attract thieves. These people certainly left a light footprint.

There were other aspects of forest lore: how to read the constellations and calculate the lunar phases (a skill that became useful when the Order began to have regular decision-making meetings); how to deal with robbers; and how to manage the host of benign and hostile spirits that frequented remote places. Yes, there was always that: spirits of all kinds would visit those who had dropped out of the human world, occasionally to tease or question, sometimes to challenge. All these the Buddha and his disciples received graciously and with tolerance, but without subservience. 'Dhamma-combat', the non-violent standing on truth, could occur at times when a demon confronted the Buddha or an enlightened disciple. '*I know you, Mara,*' was the Buddha's standard response to the great tempter, along with an asseveration as to his freedom from greed, hatred and delusion. At which riposte, Mara would slink off, frustrated and disappointed.

Such then was the environment that the Bodhisatta wandered through on his quest, until he arrived at Uruvelā, in present-day Bihar.

There I saw an agreeable piece of ground, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I considered: 'This will serve for the striving of a clansman intent on striving.' (M.26: 17)

That grove did indeed serve him well; under the spreading boughs of a fig tree, the young man's mind at one time recollected a time under another tree – as a boy:

I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first meditative state (jhāna), which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. 'Could that be the path to enlightenment?' Then, following on that memory, came the realization: 'That is indeed the path to enlightenment.' (M.36: 31)

Recollecting thus, and taking in the ambience of a peaceful, natural abode, the Bodhisatta attuned his awareness to in- and out-breathing, and through the course of the night cast off all obstacles to realize liberation, the Deathless.

THE GREAT OUTREACH

The fig tree receives the honours as the site of the Buddha's awakening, but the accounts take note of other trees in that very grove, where the newly-awakened sage spent the ensuing six weeks. Moving from the Ajapāla Nigrodha to the Mucalinda, to the Rājāyatana tree for days at a time as if savouring their presence, he contemplated the nature of the cosmos. Were trees just coincidental, or was the very quality that motivated his teaching – *anukampa*, 'a trembling with', an empathy beyond liking or even being able to help – somehow induced by the trembling that the leaves of even the greatest tree will make as the wind moves through it? What matters for us is that although deeply rooted in transcendence, the Buddha still felt a shimmer of concern as the world moved through his awareness. He left the grove and set out to teach, by word, deed and sheer presence. Even on his deathbed, that concern was there: he was inviting questions until his last breath.

His concern wasn't just reserved for those he could instruct; the Buddha's empathy extended to all creatures. At one time, he and some of the bhikkhus were invited to spend the Rains at Veranja; having accepted, they were bound to stay there for three months, even when, as it turned out, there was a famine in the town. The Sangha had to resort to eating such horse-bran as the local traders could spare. One disciple suggested turning the earth over in order to extract a rich humus, but the Buddha forbade that on the grounds that the small creatures of the earth would be disturbed (*Vinaya: Suttavibhanga, Pārājika 1*).

It was much the same when a bhikkhu tried to make himself a hut out of river clay: the Buddha ordered him to desist on the grounds that insects living in the clay would be killed when the clay dried out (*Vinaya: Suttavibhanga, Pārājika 2*). Furthermore, trees were not to be cut down, out of respect for the spirits who dwelt in them. There was even a rule that forbade pouring water with living beings in it onto the ground. So, along with the basic *samaṇa* code of frugality, celibacy and truthfulness, total harmlessness was the norm. And although he wasn't in a position to make rules for householders, his views on slaughtering an animal for food were made graphically clear in a discourse given to the physician Jīvaka:

If anyone deliberately slaughters an animal for the Buddha or his disciples, he performs the following five kinds of gravely unwholesome actions – firstly, when he gives the order: 'Go and bring such and such an animal here.' With this he has committed a gravely unwholesome deed. Secondly, when he causes the animal to be dragged by the neck thus causing the creature much pain and distress. With this he has committed a gravely unwholesome deed. Thirdly, when he orders his men to kill the animal ... Fourthly, when he has the animal killed, thus causing it much pain and distress ... Fifthly, when he offers the Buddha and his disciples meat that has been deliberately slaughtered, he has committed a gravely unwholesome deed.' (M.55: 12)

Given this, it may seem strange that the Buddha didn't forbid his *samaṇa* disciples to eat meat. But taken in context, the non-prohibition fits. He had already vividly pointed out the evil of taking life and of offering meat so obtained to the Sangha. On the other hand, the *samaṇas* were to live dependent on what lay people offered and the alms-round was a way to generate a sense of community: how would it work if some offerings were rejected? Moreover, when casual donors had gained faith and heard the teachings, they would refrain from taking life; so as there were no butcher's shops selling meat, the question of eating it would take care of itself. Meanwhile, the schismatic bhikkhu Devadatta had proposed compulsory vegetarianism, along with a number of other strictures, with the very intent of splitting the community. So the Buddha refused to make a prohibition – all the rules arose from cases that necessitated them, and there had been no such case. His way was always to encourage careful attention and inquiry rather than create rules just for the sake of it. Accordingly, he made vegetarianism optional: the *samaṇas* could accept meat – as long as they had no grounds for suspecting that the animal had been specifically killed to feed them. What his response would have been if meat hadn't been obtained by the occasional slaughter of one animal, but the systematic and consumer-driven mass killing of billions, we can only speculate.

All in all, moral sensitivity was an essential aspect of the Buddha's life and teaching; an understanding of the deep effects of good and evil – effects that extended through lifetimes – was the second of the three great realizations of his night of awakening. The other two? First was an insight into the process of transmigration, then the understanding of cause and effect, and finally the process of liberation. The second realization – that of the truth of the consequences of good and bad actions, or 'kamma' – was thus pivotal. It signified that we have alternatives, and that our future isn't predestined or subject to the plan or whim of a deity; it arises from the way we live now.

If with an impure mind, a person speaks or acts, suffering follows them like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox ... If with a pure mind, a

person speaks or acts, happiness follows them like their never-departing shadow. (Dhp. 1-2)

These realizations were revolutionary, and not part of the Vedic understanding – that considered that through oblations, sacrifices and *tapas*, one’s soul would ascend to heavenly realms after death. For the Buddha, the meaningful sacrifice was through the generosity and harmlessness that would cause virtuous seers to visit, and consequently through committing to a training in *siladhamma* that had harmlessness and non-abuse as its core premise. The animal kingdom should have celebrated: prior to the Buddha, cattle were slaughtered by the hundreds as offerings to the gods; but even in India today the cow is a protected creature.

THE THREAD OF LETTING GO

Despite his many injunctions towards harmlessness and peaceful co-existence, the Buddha didn’t imagine that the final end of his or his

11.2

A Sama \square a’s Wealth

1 The Four Requisites

- Wisely reflecting, I use alms-food: not for fun, not for pleasure, not for fattening, not for beautification; only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body, for keeping it healthy ... thinking thus – ‘I shall allay hunger without over-eating, so that I continue to live blamelessly and at ease.’
- Wisely reflecting, I use the robes: only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, burning and creeping things; only for the sake of modesty.

• Wisely reflecting, I use the lodgings: only to ward off cold, to ward off heat ... only to remove the danger from weather and for the sake of privacy.

• Wisely reflecting, I use supports for the sick and medicinal requisites: only to ward off painful feelings that have arisen, for the maximum freedom from disease.

2 The Four Measureless Mind-States

• ‘Here a bhikkhu, with his mind filled with loving-kindness ... compassion ... sympathetic joy ... equanimity, dwells suffusing the entire cosmos, ... everywhere with a mind filled, abundant, unbounded, free from hatred and ill-will. This is wealth for a bhikkhu.’
(D.26: 28)

disciples' quest would be to settle down happily in the material world. The natural world presented dangerous animals, disease, hunger, and the discomfort of extreme weather, as well as inevitable death. As for the human world of the Buddha's time – it's depicted as riven with wars; and even his community of disciples contained errant and quarrelsome members who the Buddha was forever having to deal with. Surely it was for an escape from all this that the Buddha had left home?

Yes, but the escape, the Way that he discovered and that he referred to as the 'Middle Way avoiding extremes', didn't proceed by a rejection of the world, but through ceasing to grasp at, indulge in, or get stirred up by it. In this respect, the Buddha found that, through deepening into the calmer aspects of direct experience, sense-data and thoughts dissolve in the mind, and other aspects of the cosmos – subtle perceptions and luminous energies – arise. And with further deepening, they too pass. That message of ceasing seeded another realization: all places in this cosmos, being subject to change, must be a source of suffering if one tries to set down roots in them. So rather than hang onto even a refined level of experience, the ceasing of craving and of clinging to anything had to be the main point to focus on. Letting go was thus the supreme skill – and a graduated liberation. As a cultivation, its theme is encapsulated in a sketch of the process of Dhamma-practice that resounds through many of the suttas: *'dependent on disengagement, dependent on dispassion, dependent on ceasing – ripening in release.'** This is not a practice of annihilation, but of careful disengagement: to step back and coolly experience how the self-domain of sensations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions and states of consciousness – everything that could be called 'me' or 'mine' – is subject to fading out. As to what, if anything,

*This trope occurs in M.2 and throughout the *Maggasamyutta* and *Bojjhngasamyutta* (S.45 and 46).

remained, the Buddha called it ‘the Deathless’ – to be realized through the deep letting go of ‘nibbāna’ – literally ‘unbinding’.*

... perceptions of the base of nothingness, and perceptions of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception – this is identity as far as identity extends. This is the Deathless, namely, the liberation of the mind through not clinging. (M.106)

And yet, he could arise out of that and pick up an active life walking through the forests and villages and teaching out of compassion for the manyfolk. His teaching went to the foundation of suffering – clinging and the greed, hatred and delusion that entwine the heart. At that time, the environment of trees and rivers and animals wasn’t endangered; other than through taking life, the human impact on the rest of the biosphere was minimal. He did, however, emphasize ethics, mutual respect and goodwill as irreplaceable norms for restraining and replacing greed, hatred and delusion. And he connected, almost prophetically, a decline in ethical standards to environmental decay:

When people are on fire with improper passion, overwhelmed by depraved desires, obsessed by wrong teachings ... the sky does not rain down steadily. It is ... hard to get a meal. The crops are bad, afflicted with mildew and grown to mere stubs. (A.3: 56) (Woodward trans.)

He knew the cosmos; therefore he saw a correlation between human behaviour and the material domain. In the multi-dimensional vision of the discourses, the aridity of the skies is due to the displeasure of the *devas* at human immorality. But even in terms of our current map of the cosmos, it’s easy to conclude that when there is exploitation, selfishness and abuse, the natural world would be bound to suffer. It’s just that in our version of the cosmos, the natural world doesn’t respond; it’s either a passive victim, or dead already.

*Although the early texts use Pali – as in *nibbāna*, *Dhamma*, *kamma* – in the West, the later Sanskrit versions – *nirvāna*, *dharma*, *karma* – are common.

The world-view of the discourses is that the entire cosmos is intelligent and accessible. So, having picked up the responsibility to teach, the Buddha widened the range of his teachings to instruct a wide range of beings: *samaṇas*, merchants and kings; spirits and animals. He instructed in terms of ethics, goodwill, family and business affairs and social cohesion. His teaching covered the subtleties of mind, as well as mundane material details – such as a suitable kind of footwear for *samaṇas* who had tender feet. He gave careful attention to all of it, and showed that through wise responses, it could be brought into harmony. And from that foundation, for those with the skill and dedication, the Deathless could be known.

In his eightieth year, with his body wearing out, the Buddha calmly accepted its demise, choosing to pass away under a sal tree. As to a future existence after death – he refused to comment other than to state that he would not take birth again in any realm, human or divine. Even more to the point, that the option of the Deathless was available for those who followed his Path. He had, by the time of his death, tirelessly and thoroughly elaborated on that. How then to best summarize the prodigious range and depth of instructions, stories and fables that he had presented over forty-five years? Famously, he commented that of all that he had taught, demonstrated and revealed, there were Four Noble Truths that contained the gist of his Path. As befitted a man of the forest, he called them ‘a *handful of leaves*.’ (S.56: 31)



The Dhamma: The Wheel to End All Journeys

... JUST AS THE FOOTPRINT OF ANY LIVING BEING THAT WALKS CAN BE PLACED WITHIN AN ELEPHANT'S FOOTPRINT ... SO TOO, ALL WHOLESOME STATES CAN BE INCLUDED IN THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS. IN WHAT FOUR? IN THE NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING ... OF THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING ... OF THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING ... OF THE WAY LEADING TO THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING.

(M.28: 2)

HUB, SPOKES AND RIM

With so much emphasis on action, where did the stillness go? What about the space beneath the tree? The brief answer is that most of the Buddha's teachings define a Path, a Way to be walked, a task to be carried out, or a tangle to be escaped from. It is through the purifying results of right action, internally as well as externally, that the mind realizes its deep and wise stillness. For an adept, this kind of stillness is always there, even in the midst of action, where it manifests as a calm freedom from personal bias. It is the stillness at the centre of a wheel.

That the Wheel should be the symbol of the Dhamma is evident even in the Buddha's first discourse, the 'Discourse that Sets Rolling the Wheel of Dhamma.'^{*} The image fits in several ways: in the iconography of the Buddha's time, the Wheel meant the totality, the entire world; hence to emphasize their omnipotence, great kings were called Wheel-Turning Monarchs. Furthermore, the Wheel is a teaching that goes somewhere useful; it's a teaching that is effected by action; it requires balance to run correctly; and it's a teaching that's made of a hub, spokes and a rim. First the rim: the Buddha intended that his teaching have wide coverage; and so he not only taught for the welfare of all but used as his key point, not an ideology (which could be argued over) or a cosmology (which could be believed or disbelieved) but the universal truth of suffering and stress or '*dukkha*': illness, death, separation from the loved, association with what one dislikes. It's an approach that hasn't gone out of date: underlying all our problems with overpopulation, immigration, and environmental abuse, is *dukkha* and the defective responses to it. To acknowledge *dukkha* is the first realization that turns the mind around: hence this is called the First Noble Truth. If, on the other hand, we don't meet this universal human problem collectively with clarity and compassion, we set up the spiralling forces of attachment, non-sharing and callousness that tear our environment apart. To acknowledge this human contribution – of clinging and craving – that internalizes and compounds more suffering, is the Second Noble Truth. The Buddha turned his Wheel to undo those very forces: the Third Truth, that of letting go, or non-clinging. Through this, nibbāna and the Deathless (the two terms are roughly synonymous) can be realized.

The Fourth Truth deals with the Path and the integration of non-clinging into a way of life. Configured in this process, the Wheel of Dhamma has eight spokes that act as the driving force, and they work together to form the Path, the Fourth Truth. These eight spokes

^{*}*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (S.56: 11).

are: right view, which supports right attitude, speech, action and livelihood; they in turn support right effort of mind, right mindfulness and right unification of mind. The contemplative aspects clarify the mind and provide insight into right view; so that there is harmony between outer work and inner deepening. The mind that knows letting go is not caught in the spin of comings and goings of birth and death; through its right actions and insight it realizes an unchanging awareness beyond that – the Deathless element (also referred to as ‘Unconditioned’).

Dependent Arising (Patīccasamuppāda)

II.3

A traditional literal translation

Dependent on ignorance¹ are kamma-formations; dependent on kamma-formations² is consciousness; dependent on consciousness³ is name and form; dependent on name and form⁴ are the six sense-spheres; dependent on the six sense-spheres⁵ is contact; dependent on contact⁶ is feeling; dependent on feeling⁷ is craving; dependent on craving⁸ is clinging; dependent on clinging⁹ is becoming; dependent on becoming¹⁰ is birth; dependent on birth¹¹ is ageing, sickness, death¹², sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair¹³ ... But with the complete, dispassionate ceasing of ignorance is the ceasing of kamma-formations [the reverse of the above] ... is the ceasing of this mass of suffering.

An explanatory rendition

When ignorance¹ is present habitual activities² condition consciousness³ to operate in terms of subjective and objective domains.⁴ These domains of experience are held as reality

by six sense-fields⁵ that generate contact impressions.⁶ Contact is registered in terms of agreeable, disagreeable or neutral tones of feeling.⁷

These feeling-tones condition thirst⁸ (for more, or for less) and that causes one to hold on.⁹ Dependent on what one holds on to, one gets shaped by it.¹⁰ So that determines who or what one senses oneself as being.¹¹

Whatever is sensed as being myself is subject to ageing, death¹², sorrow, grieving, dissatisfaction and despair.¹³ This is how the tangle of dissatisfaction gets formed.

But when ignorance is completely lifted from the mind ...

[the reverse of the above] ...

is the ceasing of this mass of suffering.

1. avijjā; 2. sankhārā; 3. viññāna; 4. nāmarūpa; 5. salāyatanā; 6. phassa; 7. vedanā; 8. taṇhā; 9. upādāna; 10. bhava; 11. jāti; 12. jarāmaranaṃ; 13. dukkha-domanassaupāyasa-upayasa.

The effectiveness of the Path depends on each individual's application. But the Buddha taught that, although one might not have completed the Path in this life, even letting go of a degree of ill-will or craving would still bring benefit in the here and now and lead to a fortunate rebirth after death. We may be sceptical about the last detail, but these longer-term benefits become clear when one looks more deeply into the nature of mind and its conscious processes, and even who we assume we are. Such an analysis forms another Wheel of the Buddha's teaching.

DEPENDENT ARISING AND CO-DEPENDENCY

This analysis presents a web of dependently arising factors that explains the conditioned arising and ceasing of suffering. Dependent arising (*paticcasamuppāda*) is often symbolized in Buddhist iconography as a Wheel of twelve spokes, in which each spoke represents an aspect of the psychological structure that underlies our normal level of experience.* The first and crucial spoke is of a 'non-clarity' (*avijjā*) that suggests that we stand apart from, and yet can somehow get, internalize and store up aspects of what happens to us. So with *avijjā* we're in a contradiction in which our awareness is blurred and the contradiction is ignored. Hence *avijjā* is generally translated as 'ignorance'. Such ignorance is akin to holding one's breath while wondering why this is stressful rather than nourishing; we should realize that holding on doesn't work. Moreover, we should also notice that we're not separate enough from what we dislike; we can't get away from unpleasant feeling, sorrow and death. Another point then: we're not in control. We may close down and attempt to defend ourselves; but what we don't wish for still arises, so this strategy is also of limited success. Point three: we can't seal ourselves off from life.

*Although this image is easy to apprehend, it can't convey the dynamic weave of *paticcasamuppāda* accurately. Ven. Thānissaro gets closer when he likens it to 'feedback loops' in dynamic systems.

The strategies that arise from ignorance – reaching out, holding on and resisting – result in the mind lurching as it rushes forward and freezing as it seizes or defends. Because of this, it careens through sense-impressions with their agreeable or disagreeable qualities (*vedanā*); and this supports the arising of more spokes of the Wheel. First is craving (*taṇhā*) – to have, be or get away from phenomena that are highlighted and fed by that very craving; then clinging (*upadāna*) to the possible (but limited) benefits of the craving, then becoming (*bhava*), that is forming an identity of being someone who will receive those beneficial results. Whatever the other results may be, one that predominates is a restless drive towards a goal that the spinning can never bring around. Hence the term ‘wandering on’ – *samsāra*.

However, the teaching also presents how craving, clinging, stress and suffering can dependently cease. So this Wheel of *samsāra* is not solid; its apparent structure is really just the spin of factors that arise dependent on each other. Thus Dhamma-practice is based on the equation that if ignorance is replaced by clarity (*vijjā*), the Wheel deconstructs and the stillness of the Unconditioned is realized.

The deconstruction of *samsāra* comes around through carefully attending to its spokes. Feeling, craving and clinging are the ones where the Wheel gets really lively, but with calm and penetrative attention, it can be seen that each one depends on ignorance about the others to keep it going. For example, when affected by ignorance, pleasant feeling is viewed as something that will fulfil one’s desires – but it doesn’t: feeling passes in a blur and then we want more. The blur of ignorance makes it a support for craving. Craving itself, if it isn’t seen through, seems to be about to get hold of something fulfilling – but it doesn’t do that: we remain restless and hungry for something new. Clinging attaches our security and well-being to what has to pass: ever known a house that doesn’t need effort (and money) to keep it intact? Is there a belief that doesn’t generate conflict when attached to? Is there a system that when clung to, doesn’t stifle us? In

the face of the evidence, it's only the unseen addiction that keeps us pushing that Wheel.

Any addiction takes skill and perseverance to break. Most valued in the liberation of the mind – and thereby its behaviour – is the presence of an awareness that is void of bias. This is a subtle kind of seeing, *'beyond the sphere of mere reason', 'dependent on disengagement, dependent on dispassion'*: a careful attention to craving and clinging just as phenomena, not in terms of what they say or stick to, and not as some personal foible. It's a penetrative attention, a looking into how the mind operates. The switch that puts the brakes on the Wheel is to just see things as they really are, as an impersonal process: then to sustain that awareness with the strength of the unbiased attention called *'mindfulness' (sati)*. To not add to the push of feeling, its promises and urges, but to bear it in stillness until it fades, and to enter the awareness that can do that. *'All phenomena ... converge on feeling ... Mindfulness exercises authority over them. Wisdom is their supervisor. Liberation is their core. They culminate in the Deathless ...'* (A.10: 58). This then is not any normal seeing, but a right handling, whose turn is expressed as the Third Noble Truth: *'with the complete, dispassionate relinquishment of every kind of craving, there is release that leaves nothing out.'*

Time for a break? This is not light material.

Let's resume.

The kind of attention required for liberation arises from a calm and clear mind and is called *'insight' (vipassanā)*. What insight *'sees'* on a wider scale is *'co-dependency' – idappaccayatā*. This view reveals our world of direct experience and consciousness as arising in a mutual dependency. It's a world-changing view, because it undercuts the notion of consciousness being separate from the rest of Creation. This subtle point has far-reaching consequences.

Intellectually, we can surmise that consciousness (*viññāna*) arises within a life form, a body; it's not floating in a void. Furthermore, it is the process of consciousness that, through metabolism and

respiration, sustains that life form and without which it is dead; it also supports the reproductive system that brings new bodies into existence. Thus consciousness and its respective life form arise together. It's not that one creates the other; they are co-dependent aspects of a living process. We can also widen this co-dependent view to cover social realities – i.e. that we affect and shape each other for good or bad – as well as ecology: that the planet is affected by our actions, and we are affected by its climate and elements. If we live in accord with this principle, respect, gratitude and moral integrity become norms. This already is a big piece to comprehend and live out; and would bring around a huge transformation of the domination-exploitation mind-set.

However, meditative insight takes the understanding of co-dependency deeper into how we see the world, and each other. For instance, it's clear that the very act of consciousness requires an object (*rūpa*) to be conscious of and a sense organ to apprehend it. Otherwise it can't occur. Obviously, the externally-focused consciousnesses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) have to connect to the rest of creation in order to operate. What isn't so clear outside of meditation is how the mind adjusts what the external senses convey. This occurs as the mind-consciousness 'conceives' (*maññati*) and creates a perception, a 'signifier' (*saññā*), in accordance with a library of cognitive categories – as: 'this tall green thing is a tree'. This signifier gives us an inner model of what we're with. So what we 'see', and cling to, is what things represent to us, and that arises through the mental act that creates a signifier. With insight, these perceptions can be seen as arising and passing, as fallible and relative, and the flow of conceiving is checked. If instead we cling to these perceptions, we take them to be the real world – an object of our desires and fears. This process of objectification (*papañca*) is the means by which ignorance plays out in the external material domain.

What appears as a rather academic piece of Buddhist teaching is then about something that affects all of us. To give a few examples:

the ocean may signify a limitless mass of water into which our trash will continually dissolve and disappear so that we can enjoy swimming in it; and that despite all the pollution and oil-slicks, it will provide us with fish to feed our growing population. This is a highly agreeable perception, but how clear and reasonable is it? We may ‘see’ the earth as a lovely place for recreation, no matter how many beer-cans we dump in it, no matter how many landfills we create and no matter how much forest we remove. That’s a convenient notion too. There are a few more. To the ignorant mind, the earth appears as a limitless resource from which we can extract what we need forever. Our eyes see gold, a metal of far less use than iron (or water for that matter) and whose extraction poisons rivers, land and people. At the same time our perceptions of it have granted it value and status, and so gold becomes a substance that people will kill for. Sheer fantasy, and a demonic one at that. Clearly, following agreeable notions and perceptions can lead to some gross errors. Meanwhile, our real needs – for peace of mind, harmony and meaning – are ignored. *‘Dependent on ignorance are the conditioning forces [sankhārā] that direct consciousness ... and thus is the origin of this whole mass of suffering,’* as the dependent arising teaching has it.*

The question then is: can we see things as they are: that with the gold bracelet comes the arsenic and mercury that pollute rivers, and poison miners? That trees are not just lumber to be used for our furnishings, but potent sources of life and health? That, as we throw things away, there is no place that’s ‘away’ – it’s all here and will come back to us? Can we learn to live more happily in a cosmos shorn of fantasy?

*This is the most common formula to describe dependent arising. The word ‘sankhārā’ is not an easy one to translate into English, and it has been variously rendered as ‘formations’, ‘volitional tendencies’, ‘fabrications’, ‘designations’ and ‘preparations’. The word refers to making and constructing, but in a way that is not always clear or conscious. It can refer to the energetic ‘intelligence’ that controls breathing in and out, or that constructs thoughts, or that generates the surge and flutter of impulses. Here I use ‘conditioning forces’ to capture this, but I have also found ‘programs’ to be a useful term, because *sankhārā* become habitual and generate habitual reactions in the mind.

Briefly speaking, yes we can. The teaching on dependent arising, like all the Buddha's teaching, was given in order to eliminate the suffering that we create. And that elimination depends on bringing forth strengths and clarity that otherwise aren't developed. With a degree of clarity, we can see how we create suffering for ourselves and the world in general through our self-oriented views and distorted perceptions. Insight-based attention will check those perceptions that encourage selfishness, because it is aware of the weave that includes our own mind-state: accordingly, we grow more compassionate and generous – and that creates ease. Also, whatever the state or mentality of anyone else, we don't have to make our perceptions of others a basis for their manipulation or abuse: these mental actions numb our own hearts. So, dependent on relaxing some of our biases and discerning the connections between our own well-being and that of others, something beautiful is born. Mutuality, goodwill and a love of harmony can replace the afflictions of selfishness and mistrust – and they offer real support. This is the logic of insight: through dealing with consciousness and how it fabricates a world of self and others, stress can come to an end.

SELF-VIEW: WE'RE BETTER OFF WITHOUT IT

The further and transformative consequence of putting the principles of dependency into practice is the elimination of self-view. This comes around through insight into the flow of subtle mental events or qualia (*dhammā*) – such as feeling, perception and intention (*cetanā*) – that may be running in the mind at any given time. With adequate clarity and calm, these can be seen as dependently arising. An obvious case is that we feel painful feeling dependent on a thought, sound or a taste. However, the greater the self-involvement in phenomena is, the more intense the feeling: the memory of a loved one can be pleasant, while thinking about an enemy feels unpleasant. Mental feeling is based on perception, and that signifier arises in

terms of how things strike *me*. Thus with this self-view, the flow of events gets nailed down into objects, and interests, habits, addictions and phobias get set. These *dhammā* then select the topics that attract or disturb us – and that determines where we go in our lives.

Of course, perceptions may change: when the ‘threatening’ person falls sick we may flush with compassion; when they offer service, they become allies. So which is the real person? More to the point, which perception is to be followed? Are bears lovable, cuddly creatures, or menaces to be shot, or valuable aspects of the ecosystem? Even more to the point: what perception do you have of yourself?

You could say it all depends – on which features you focus on, and on what your attitude and motivation are. In other words, at the point of contact (*phassa*) these subjective qualities fashion the perception. Contact is then not neutral impact, but comes with built-in tendencies to fashion how the observed is perceived. And the observer’s state of mind is correspondingly shaped by the observed. Accordingly, Buddhist commentators (amongst others) all agree that our perceived reality is not a fixed object, but a mesh of relational factors in which the observer and the observed are merely positions in a co-dependent weave. Take the exegetical exploration of *dhammā*, the *Abhidhamma*:

Analysis shows that the world of experience is resolvable into a plurality of factors; synthesis shows that these factors are not discrete entities existing in themselves but inter-connected and interdependent nodes in a complex web of relationships ... In actuality the world given to experience is a vast network of tightly interwoven relations.⁴
Y. Karunadāsa

Or, as Werner Heisenberg, a founder of quantum theory, notes:

The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole.⁵

Or, in the words of Nāgārjuna (c. 170 CE):

Neither from itself nor from another,/ Nor from both,/ Nor without a cause, / Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.⁶

Or, as H.H. the Dalai Lama writes:

Everything is composed of dependently related events, of continuously interacting phenomena with no fixed, immutable essence, which are themselves in constantly changing dynamic relations.⁷

Quantum physicists use their experiments, but why the Buddhists speak with such certainty is due to meditation. In the depths of mind that meditation opens, the world and the self are revealed as dependently arising from the ongoing flow of these *dhammā*. As Nāgārjuna argues, these phenomena don't arise at random, but in a causal fashion to which qualia such as intention, attention, perception and latent tendencies (*anusaya*) all contribute. This stands in contrast to 'self view', which holds that the world is a fixed thing 'out there', and the self is not causally arising and not made up of a plurality of factors, but is a fixed and singular 'me'.

The critical point is that this 'me' is always going to hit stress, because such a structure is relationally dumb; it accentuates the tendency to fixed views, ingrained habits, and an inability to live in harmony with others or be refreshed and regenerated. Meanwhile, the fact that we all experience ourselves as having a degree of free choice, some facility in relating to others as well as the capacity to learn and adapt, is personally-verifiable evidence that we are not this fixed and independent entity, my 'self'. It's just that ignorance gets us to act as if we are.

In further challenging the idea of a self as an agent, H.H. the Dalai Lama points out:

Effectively, the notion of intrinsic, independent existence is incompatible with causation. This is because causation implies contingency and dependence, while anything that possesses independent existence would be immutable and self-enclosed.⁸

*In this cryptic verse, Nāgārjuna negates the duality of 'self' and 'other', or even of a combination of the two, as forming the basis for phenomena. And yet he affirms that there is a causal process that gives rise to the appearance of phenomena.

Since ‘self as actor’ is the guiding star of the ordinary person’s life, insight into the nature of action is crucial. Regarding this node in the relational web, rather than attributing action to an independent actor (who if they were independent could have no effect on any similarly independent thing), insight reveals action as arising from intention – the responses and reactions that have feeling and perception as their source. Customarily, around the habitual nature of actions (to have, get away from, linger on, brush off, etc., etc.), along with the instinct for self-definition, there arises a familiar sense: ‘I am doing this’ (and thereby I receive the judgements that those actions bring forth). This familiarity is the sign of a tendency, disposition and ‘conceit’. Because deep introspection reveals that there isn’t a solid person at the centre of one’s life, just tendencies that get stuck. These clinging tendencies are like the currents in a river, or the turbulence in air: they drive the heart-mind into forming a self so repeatedly that we get to believe that this self is solid and a foundation for action.

We can, however, act more skilfully (and therefore be happier) without adopting this notion as a basis. This is because the ever-accessible approach of Dhamma is to strengthen clarity so that confusion and blind assumptions don’t take over. Aspects of self-interest have to be sacrificed to prioritize this. The search for truth requires that we give up following instinctive reflexes, however gratifying they may seem in the short-term. It also entails focusing insightful attention on whether the mind-state that generates tendencies and actions is biased with greed, hatred or delusion. A mind that is clearly aware gives us the choice to follow that drive – or not. That’s what *sīla* training is about, and why it is so pivotal: you get to witness the inclination to abuse, deceive or manipulate, to check it, and to review what perception or tendency triggered what intention. By thus replacing ignorance with clarity, fulfilling qualities such as calm, integrity, contentment, and goodwill dependently arise. Such

Dhamma factors form a weave that has greater strength and agility than the tangle of self-view.

It is through dwelling in an awareness accordingly enriched that the complete release of nibbāna can be realized. And, as in the case of the Buddha, while the functioning embodied consciousness is still alive, then the results of that release can be shared.

If greed, hatred and delusion are given up, one neither aims at one's own ruin, nor others' ruin, nor at the ruin of both, and one suffers no more mental distress and grief. This is nibbāna realizable in this very lifetime, immediate, inviting, attractive and comprehensible by the wise. (A.3: 55)

NON-SEPARATION AND WISE COMPANIONSHIP

Dependent arising urges a deep integrity: because it's not just that our mind-states affect how we are; as they're acted on, they affect others. They also determine what long-term tendencies we lay down. Latent tendencies act like magnets, and assemble consciousness in accord with their polarity – and with the Buddhist understanding that consciousness is not an entity or unbroken flow, but dripping rapidly and affected by the pull of tendencies. Hence death is like a pause between two drips. A further birth is determined, not randomly, but by the good or bad or confused tendencies we have laid down.

So for one who seeks the good and the true, what becomes vitally important is not who I am, or will be, what I want, or whether the world is an illusion, but whether the mind is led by clarity or bias; by greed or sharing; by goodwill, fear or confusion. Dependent on that process, self-view has to progressively deconstruct.

One fruition in that process is called 'non-objectifying', or 'not creating an object' (*atammayatā*)*. This alludes to the way that, under

**Atammayatā* literally means 'not made of that', or more colloquially, 'whatever you signify it as, it's other than that.'

the influence of self-view, the mind maps everything and everyone as an object that it measures in terms of wishes and judgements. This is ignorance as *papañca* – ‘objectifying’. In the reality of interacting *dhammā*, it forms an invalid relationship, supportive of subjective bias. Objectifying fixes the world, other people and even the self it has generated as objects woven with value judgements and meshed with its unfulfilled craving. Consequently, whatever is taken as an object – the earth and its creatures, other humans, and finally our own bodies and minds – becomes liable to abuse. So by creating a self that’s separate from what it experiences, objectifying is the source of both our demonic power and our terrible loneliness and hunger. Hence the human conundrum – whose dysfunctional effects then get magnified by the power of science and technology. *Atammayatā* on the other hand, while experiencing the arising of consciousness, experiences without adding inferences:

... in the seen there will be merely the seen; in the heard there will be merely the heard; in the sensed there will be merely the sensed; in the cognized there will be merely the cognized. (S.35: 95)

Knowing, or even considering thus, one realizes that a wise and ethical concern, one that includes all forms of life, has to grow in accordance with any other human, technological or ideological development. Furthermore, through fully abiding in this realization, the web of *dhammā* releases, or ceases to pertain. As the Buddha goes on to say:

When ... you are not ‘therein,’ then you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. This itself is the end of suffering. (S.35: 95)

This then is a world-changing teaching. It establishes relationship as the only reality in the created world, and the way through which one’s creations cease in the uncreated. The supreme training towards that is to work on relationship. And the academy, or better, the workshop, is this living cosmos. Thus, just as a carpenter has to

understand the wood and his or her tools and how to handle them to avoid splintering or damage, so a wise practitioner learns to relate to their mind:

Irrigators channel the waters;
fletchers straighten arrows;
carpenters shape wood;
the wise train themselves.
(Dhp. 80)

Through these similes of craftsmanship, a relational sense is advocated: training is not just a matter of what you bring forth, but how it fits; not a spontaneous flow of mind, but a handling of both skill and of sensitivity to the material in hand. Living material at that. Consequently, in order to train their behaviour in line with that skill, a person needs to live in the company of wise friends. Theory just won't do. As the Buddha commented, awakening depends on '*association with the wise, hearing the Dhamma, careful attention, and conduct in accordance with Dhamma*' (A.4: 246). With the modesty of a pragmatist, he recognized that to be personally realizable his Dhamma required spiritual friendship. So the Buddha gave a lot of his energy and wisdom into creating an Order and a companionship that would do just that.



The Sangha: Bearers of the Seeds

THE BUDDHA PRAISED LIVING IN THE FOREST BECAUSE THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SOLITUDE THAT IT GIVES US IS CONDUCIVE TO THE PRACTICE OF LIBERATION. HOWEVER, HE DIDN'T WANT US TO BECOME DEPENDENT UPON LIVING IN THE FOREST OR GET STUCK IN ITS PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY. WE COME TO PRACTISE IN ORDER FOR WISDOM TO ARISE. HERE IN THE FOREST WE CAN SOW AND CULTIVATE THE SEEDS OF WISDOM. LIVING AMONGST CHAOS AND TURMOIL THESE SEEDS HAVE DIFFICULTY IN GROWING BUT ONCE WE HAVE LEARNED TO LIVE IN THE FOREST, WE CAN RETURN AND CONTEND WITH THE CITY AND ALL THE STIMULATION OF THE SENSES THAT IT BRINGS US. LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE FOREST MEANS TO ALLOW WISDOM TO GROW AND DEVELOP. WE CAN THEN APPLY THIS WISDOM NO MATTER WHERE WE GO.⁹

AJAHN CHAH

VINAYA: THE MATRIX OF THE SANGHA

The Buddha often presented his Path in terms of a couplet: Dhamma, mostly dealing with the 'internal' processes of mind, and Vinaya – 'Discipline' – dealing with *sīladhamma*, specifically the conduct of his *samaṇa* disciples. The rationale behind the Vinaya and the consequent evolution of a code of regulations, or *Pāṭimokkha* ('a complete bond'), was both to benefit the individual by warding off corruptions, and to generate and sustain an extended community of lay and gone-

forth disciples: ‘for the comfort of well-trained bhikkhus ... to arouse faith in those in whom faith in the Dhamma has not yet arisen, and to sustain it where it has arisen’ (A.2: 280).

The result of this was to gather the motley collection of forest dwellers into an Order that would exemplify the Way and its results, both in action and in appearance. And so it was: as these *samaṇas* moved through the villages, people remarked that their faculties were serene and they walked ‘clearly rejoicing with minds like the wild deer.’ They walked a talk that looked worth listening to.

The conventions of training developed over time, with the Buddha adding regulations and protocols to it whenever an occasion made it necessary. But the earliest *Pāṭimokkha* sums up some key points:

To neither disparage nor harm;
 To dwell restrained by a system of training;
 To eat with moderation
 And live in seclusion,
 With commitment to the heightened mind:
 This is the teaching of the Awakened.
Ovāda Pāṭimokkha (Dhp. 185)

As it evolved, the *Pāṭimokkha* was and still is recited on every full and new moon throughout the year. Obviously this keeps the standards well-rehearsed; but more than that, the *Pāṭimokkha* is the one regular occasion that all the *samaṇas* within a defined location are obliged to attend, no matter how reclusive their disposition. With this, the group forms around the affirmation of the Dhamma–Vinaya; and is also given the occasion for democratic decision-making and for settling any disputes. In this way, the Buddha established a commons that wasn’t based on projects, livelihood or personal friendships but on *sīladhamma* and its practical application. Neither is the Sangha defined by status or territory; its members move around from place to place. But they stay within the values-boundary of the Vinaya. And wherever a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni dwells, they help to

form and participate in the local sangha – which thereby acts as a governing body.* All formal acts – such as admitting new members, acknowledging offences and clearing them, or allocating community supplies – must be carried out by the entire local sangha. Within this community, elders train and guide disciples, and the disciples serve and respect their teachers, with whom they share lodgings. This sense of a cooperative, which trains together through modelling, encouraging, and correcting each other, sets up a system of respect for the local group of peers, elders and trainees, and for the Sangha as a whole. Respect for oneself and respect for others through conscience and concern (*hiri-ottappa*) becomes the moral core of the community; it's more effective than policing, because one can never evade one's own conscience. And strengthening conscience and concern will help to clear one's selfish tendencies:

Reverence towards the Teacher, reverence towards the Dhamma, reverence towards the Sangha, respect for the training, reverence for moral conscience and concern: these six qualities lead to the non-decline of a bhikkhu. (A.6: 33)

Frugality was also a norm: the environmentalist mantra 'reduce [consumption], repair and recycle' could have been their daily recitation. For example, the maximum size that a hut that a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni can make for themselves is 3 metres by 1.75 metres; any larger buildings can only be held communally. Clothing was limited to one set of three robes (four for bhikkhunis) made of any offered cloth, or failing that, rags or the winding sheets of corpses; food consisted of one meal made up from whatever was offered on the daily alms-round. An alms-bowl needed to have been repaired five times before one could seek a new one from a householder.

As a further example of frugality, as well as of the Sangha ethos of sharing, an incident is recorded in the scriptures whereby the bhikkhu Ānanda is offered a large number of new robes by the wives

*I use 'Sangha' to signify the institution, and 'sangha' to signify a local community.

of King Udena. The somewhat indignant king then asks Ānanda what he will do with so many robes. Ānanda says he will share them out amongst his fellow bhikkhus who have thin, worn robes. And what, the king asks, will they do with their old robes? Ānanda replies that they will make them into shawls; and, in the course of the subsequent questioning, that the old shawls will become mattress covers; the old mattress covers, floor coverings; the old floor coverings, foot-wipers; the old foot-wipers, dusters – and that the old dusters will be torn up, mixed with mud and compounded into plaster for the floor. By the end of the conversation, the king was so impressed that he gave an equivalent number of robes to Ānanda [*Vinaya: Cullavagga 1: 13-14*].

The Buddha considered this flexible but firmly based Order a mainstay for the presentation and the longevity of his Way. So much so, that causing a schism in the Sangha was one of only five heinous crimes (listed alongside killing one's parents, or an enlightened disciple, or shedding a Buddha's blood) for which it would be impossible to make amends in this lifetime.

THE SOCIETY OF LETTING GO

Having created a human hub for his Dhamma, the Buddha extended it and its outreach to form a Wheel of disciples. Firstly, he created an Order for women, the Bhikkhuni Sangha. It wasn't a step he took lightly. It wouldn't be easy to train such an Order: celibate bhikkhus could hardly share the lodgings with women and give them the close-up spiritual companionship that living in the Sangha signified. Another concern may have been that, having drawn their sons away from family life, what would householders say if the Buddha also deprived them of marriageable daughters? In many respects, the going-forth of women would stretch the Sangha and the Vinaya. But it would give women a chance to live the holy life. His compassion won the day.

Then householders. His intention had always been that this Sangha encourage householders to practise Dhamma; but through the Vinaya he could create a bond whereby those householders could be an extension to the community that would bring the Dhamma into the society. He could only create rules for those who had given up every other form of social convention and allegiance to live as *samaṇas*, but he could train the Sangha in ways that would inspire and instruct people living the family life. So *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* were enjoined to live in accord with householders through an alms-faring that depended on their goodwill and respect. In brief: they were to neither have nor use money, nor to grow, store or cook food. The relationship was further strengthened by the *samaṇas*' responsibility to offer teachings on the Middle Way to lay people. And to supervise this extended community of disciples, the Buddha laid down rules and protocols to safeguard householders' faith from the manipulation of corrupt monks and nuns.

In this way, the Vinaya forms the basis of a Dhamma-culture. It extends voluntary loyalties, and responsible companionship to all those who wish to participate. The duties of a *samaṇa* to a lay person are detailed in the *Siṅgāḷaka Sutta* (D.31: 33) as: to restrain him/her from unskillful acts; to encourage good acts; to be benevolently compassionate towards them; to offer new teachings; to correct and clarify what has been learnt; and to point towards a higher future birth. The Vinaya places limitations as to what *samaṇas* can receive or request from householders, and they are encouraged to go through the village for alms like a bee that while collecting pollen leaves the flower unharmed (Dhp. 49). The duties of a lay person in the relationship are reciprocal: to relate in kindly ways and to keep open house for *samaṇas* (as well as fellow disciples).

Just as a large banyan tree, on level ground where four roads meet, is a haven for the birds all around, even so a lay person of faith is a haven for many people: *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, male lay followers, and female lay followers. (A.5: 38)

As this relationship developed, the committed householder disciple was called ‘*upāsaka*’ (female = ‘*upāsika*’), ‘one who sits near’. These *upāsaka/upāsika* would convert the material resources of food and cloth into the happiness of generosity and the benefits of association with wise and moral beings. Accordingly, the Sangha became more settled into locations: monasteries developed near enough to the village for an alms-round, where the *upāsaka/upāsika* could visit the *samaṇas* for teachings and advice. So the Vinaya brought the *samaṇas* out of the social and environmental wilderness to a specific location, one at the margin of human society. And guided by the Buddha himself, the teaching on the ceasing of suffering grew to include practices that could encourage people in mainstream society to step out of the worldly stream.

The Buddha clearly knew what that worldly stream was about. Note his advice to the businessman Tigerfoot:

Tigerfoot, the four channels for the flowing of great wealth are these: abstinence from looseness with women, from debauchery in drinking, from cheating at dice, and having friendship, companionship and intimacy with what is good ...

These, Tigerfoot, are the four conditions that lead to a family man’s benefit and happiness here on earth.

These four conditions, Tigerfoot, lead to a family man’s benefit and happiness in the world to come ... accomplishment in terms of faith ... virtue ... generosity ... and wisdom. (A.8: 54)

He also advocated using wealth, the potentially sticky centre of worldliness, in a transformative way:

Householder, there are these four conditions which are desirable, dear, delightful, hard to come by in the world. What four?

‘May I acquire wealth by legal means ... having done so, may I along with my family and teachers obtain a good reputation ... having obtained a good reputation, may I have a long life ... and when the body breaks up, may I go to heaven.’

... Now four conditions are conducive to the attainment of these four conditions. What four?

Perfection of faith, of virtue, of generosity and of wisdom.

... Now, householder, that same noble disciple, with the wealth acquired by hard work, amassed through strength of arm, won by sweat, obtained by fair and just means, is one who can act in four ways. What are the four?

... he makes himself happy and cheerful, he is enriched with well-being; he makes his mother and father, his children and wife, his servants and employees, his friends and associates cheerful and happy, he enriches them with well-being. This, householder, is the first opportunity that he seizes, turns towards merit and makes proper use of.

Then again ... he makes himself secure against any misfortune – such as may occur through fire, water, the king, a robber, an enemy or an expectant heir. He takes steps for his defence, he makes himself secure. This is the second opportunity ...

Again ... he makes the fivefold offering – that is to relatives, to guests, to unhappy spirits, to the king and to celestial beings. This is the third opportunity ...

Then again ... he offers a gift to all samaṇas and brahmins who are zealous and have integrity and who are bent on kindness and patience, who tame, calm and cool themselves. To these he offers a gift which has the highest results, a heavenly gift which results in happiness and leads to heaven. This is the fourth opportunity ...

... If anyone's wealth be spent without these four meritorious deeds, such wealth is called 'wealth that has failed to seize the opportunity, failed to acquire merit, improperly used.' (A.4: 61)

The Buddha also praised those householders who were active in propagating the Dhamma:

Jīvaka, when a lay follower himself is consummate in faith and encourages others in the consummation of faith; when he himself is consummate in virtue and encourages others in the consummation of virtue; when he himself is consummate in generosity and encourages others in the consummation of generosity; when he himself desires to

II.4

The Ten Perfections (*Pāramī*)

Generosity/Sharing (*dāna*) Recognizing the joy of sharing, and acknowledging that we all come into this world subject to pain, sorrow, sickness and death, I aspire to offer what I can in terms of resources, hospitality, healing and wise advice.

Morality/Integrity (*sīla*) Recognizing the trust that develops from conscientiousness and fellow-feeling, I aspire to cultivate actions of body, speech and mind that turn away from hostility and harshness, and that cut off greed and manipulative behaviour.

Renunciation/Values-based Simplicity (*nekkhamma*) Recognizing the ease that arises with modesty and contentment, I aspire to relinquish needless acquisition and an imbalanced use of material resources.

Clarity/Wisdom (*paññā*) Recognizing the skill of clarity, I aspire to handle my perspectives with awareness and careful reflection, and thereby arrive at an unbiased understanding.

Energy (*virīya*) Recognizing my capacity for vigour, or for distraction and laziness, I aspire to use my energy for my long-term benefit and for the welfare of others.

Patience/Tolerance (*khantī*) Recognizing the value of tolerance and perseverance, I aspire to let go of getting my own way, cutting corners and being narrow-minded.

Truthfulness (*sacca*) Recognizing the wise relationships that can be established through my own veracity and through the honesty of others, I aspire to free my mind from biased perspectives and devious behaviour.

Resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*) Recognizing the potency of a firm heart, I aspire to hold intentions that are enriching, and to ward off vacillation on one hand and forceful goal-seeking on the other.

Goodwill (*mettā*) Recognizing the happiness of a warm heart, I aspire to cultivate empathy and compassion. Resisting mind-states based on fault-finding of myself or others, I will encourage goodwill rather than foster ideals of perfection.

Equanimity/Stability of Heart (*upekkhā*) Recognizing the peace of even-minded acceptance, I aspire to let sickness and health, blame and praise, failure and accomplishment flow through my awareness without getting distracted by them.

see the bhikkhus and encourages others to see the bhikkhus; when he himself wants to hear the true Dhamma and encourages others to hear the true Dhamma; when he himself habitually remembers the Dhamma he has heard and encourages others to remember the Dhamma they have heard; when he himself explores the meaning of the Dhamma he has heard and encourages others to explore the meaning of the Dhamma they have heard; when he himself, knowing both the Dhamma and its meaning, practises the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma and encourages others to practise the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma: then to that extent he is a lay follower who practises both for his own benefit and for the benefit of others. (A.8: 26)

The Buddha is recorded as being satisfied that the Middle Way would continue through the means of this great assembly. It fitted the two-fold model of awakening. To his measureless silence and detailed verbal teaching, and to the Wheel with its still centre and energetic spokes was now added a community of reclusive contemplatives and socially engaged householders.

THE ARIYA SANGHA AND ‘PERFECTIONS’

Thus another Sangha arose: that of the great community of committed disciples, the ‘Ariya Sangha’ of *samaṇas* and *upāsaka/upāsika*, in which the householders could bring the values of the Dhamma into the world of business, politics and raising children, while the *samaṇas* held the focus on renunciation and *nibbāna*. This is the Sangha that forms one part of the Triple Gem – the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha – that Buddhists take Refuge in to this day.

It is through these many aspects of dependency that Buddhism has taken hold in a range of societies. At its core is the mutual support between *samaṇas* and *upāsaka/upāsikas* in extended communities whose nature works against selfishness and encourages sharing and respect. Then there are the skilful means (*upāya*) that each individual

applies to work against ignorance; with the understanding that liberation doesn't only occur through sitting still. The total list of these is called *bodhipakkhiyā dhammā* – 'requisites for awakening'. It includes lists of enlightenment factors (*bojjhanga*), efforts (*pahāna*), powers (*iddhipāda*), controlling faculties (*indriya*), and strengths (*bala*), as well as the Four Establishments of mindfulness, with the Eightfold Path as the container for all the others.

To review the application of that potent set alone: all the factors of the Eightfold Path are needed, but may require different prioritization in accordance with the tendencies, strengths and blind-spots of each individual. The balance of stillness and action, of meditation and service, requires each individual's careful attention to maintain. Even so, the full realization of Dhamma is subject to dependency: some tendencies get so deeply ingrained that they form a web or 'substrate' (*upadhi*) that may take more than one lifetime to uproot. 'It all depends' could then well summarize which practices one selects among the great variety in the Buddhist world.

In accommodating the implications of co-dependency with its extended time-span and breadth of approach, another set of *upāya* was subsequently adopted – that of 'perfections'. By this time the Sangha had diverged into a range of lineages and textual transmissions, so these perfections are alternatively known as '*pāramī*' (Pali) or '*pāramita*' (Sanskrit); and whilst Sanskrit lineages devised six, the Pali lineages presented ten. Although these perfections differ in detail, they contain such qualities as discernment, energy and resolution and a form a positive weave to hold the mind against the pressure of tendencies. Moreover, the message that they convey is that one can work on clearing one's acquisitions and tendencies in daily life, through, for example, developing generosity or patience to a high degree. This presents life in the everyday world as a scenario for working on liberation; it is the foundation of 'engaged' Buddhism.

The support of practices like the perfections is essential because everyday life draws the veils of convention over insightful truth. Conventions such as a job, a country, and of course, money, present a web of forces that aren't aimed at awakening or right view. Institutions, organizations and monasteries are also conventions, and they are also liable to bias and delusion. So, accessible *śīladhamma* practices such as truthfulness, morality and sharing keep right view while our feet are on a ground in which Buddhism itself can appear as a range of institutions with fault lines and slippery patches.

'All conditioning forces [sankhārā] are subject to change,' was the last advice that the Buddha offered. So it is. Over the millennia since the Buddha's decease, 'Buddhism' has morphed and warped. One trend is universal: the *samaṇas* became monastic. Whereas in the Buddha's time, fixed residency was for the Rains Season only, over time *samaṇas* increasingly settled in monasteries where they could be readily accessed and supported by lay people and also enact their own decision-making procedures. It was a natural development: since the Vinaya structures the Sangha as a 'nation' of mini-states operating as confederacies, a settled basis made it easier to refer to agreed-upon standards, and have meetings to assist governance and ward off disputes. A reliable support base also made monasteries a viable option. And desirable: a local village could have continuing access to the views and the examples of the *samaṇa* Sangha. However, the movement from the forest to monasteries affected more than the *samaṇas*' nomadic lifestyle, it exerted an influence on the psychological location of the Sangha. To an increasing extent, its mainstream mixed with the mainstream of the local society and was given local form and colour. It therefore encouraged a culture – a growing confluence of rituals, images and customs – with the conservative inclination to underpin the society at an iconic or mythic level.

Meanwhile, the transmission of the Buddha spread in geography, localized culturally, and diverged in its expression. Even while it was confined to India, its original teachings acquired commentaries, extensions and overlays. These differing expressions amounted to differing interpretations of Dhamma, then to disputes and disharmony. Although the resultant ‘schools’ of Buddhist thought could avoid clashing by spreading to different regions, with that movement and the requirement to meet the local climate and culture, came more diversification. With regard to the texts, the sheer fact of translating the Dhamma into diverse languages had its effect. Chinese Pilgrims arriving in India 1,000 years and more after the Buddha carried home whatever they could from a ‘library’ of what was considered important or popular at the time. Translations of texts came in a haphazard way, and were of differing degrees of accuracy. In addition to this, itinerant Buddhist merchants conveyed Buddhist culture wherever they went in terms of how they remembered and venerated the Triple Gem. This brought around further diversification in terms of the icons, observances and language that were used to express the Dhamma.

It’s also a principle that people want the teachings to speak to them in accordance with their culture: talk on celestials generally leaves Westerners sceptical or bemused; whereas their predilection towards equal rights and social progress inclines Dhamma towards a more activist slant. The general principle is that to be accessible, the Buddha’s Dhamma has to fit the way the local people experience the cosmos – the social structures, world-views as well as the imperial or agrarian nature of that society differ across a territory that spans Mongolia, India, Indonesia, China and Japan. The existing spiritual and social bases of these countries affected the Dhamma in the way that a blue or green undercoat will affect the top layer that is painted over it – especially when that layer is clarity. So in its expression, the Dhamma appears in a range of hues.

KEEPING THE DHAMMA WELL-PRACTISED

The hinge point that the culture of Buddhism operates around is the relationship between the householders and the *samaṇas*. The Dhamma-Vinaya acts as the axis for that relationship. When both parties understand and support Dhamma-Vinaya, a culture that integrates ethics, meditation and understanding can be sustained. In the workings of daily life, it's a matter of respecting the various duties of the *samaṇas* to offer a calm and non-partisan perspective and present the teachings: sharing, ethics and mind-cultivation bring spirituality into this world. Through these communities thrive, people trust each other and experience contentment. By directing the expression of Dhamma rightly, we may even reset our relationship to the material domain, aka Planet Earth.

Seen in this light, the environmental crisis may catalyze a fresh approach. As Buddhism becomes increasingly transnational and grows in societies independent of the State, it can encourage the outreach of generosity and compassion to sustain proper human development. Because the promise of the Dhamma is that for one who engages its Wheel, there is the ending of worldliness and the beginning of true life; and the Vinaya supports that by warding off worldly corruption.

This does require a responsible approach. For the householders, there is the continual flood of duties and engagements that are not attuned to generosity, ethics or renunciation – or patience, goodwill and equanimity – let alone the realization of the Deathless. The increasingly tight networks of employment, legal responsibilities and management of their property readily bind and overwhelm the mind. As well as the care of children – who are even more susceptible to worldly influences.

For the Sangha, as long as it operated in terms of Vinaya, and maintained its renunciant and ethical focus, it could offer a valuable presence to the local community. However, the management

of monasteries brought with it an enhanced potential for inter-monastic rivalry and manipulation of lay people to gain their support. The territorial location of sanghas meant that they were also more readily involved in local politics – some of the village elders would have been uncles and brothers of the sangha members. Along with that came the Sangha's requirement to uphold a culture, and that involvement spread to national issues. At its worst, the Sangha's social engagement has supported nationalism and ethnic conflicts, such as those currently occurring between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

At its best, the Sangha has preserved the Dhamma and kept it well-practised. It has also been a Refuge for local and village life, offering stability, values and observances that have sustained the culture of much of Asia for over two millennia. In this respect, the majority of monastics acted as a socio-cultural support in terms of education, settling of disputes, healing, and even adopting children whom parents couldn't support. A precious sanctuary in the midst of a turbulent world. Many rural sanghas today encourage sustainable development, humanitarian projects and the preservation of the local biosphere. Furthermore, there are also the minority, generally the forest-dwelling sanghas, who still see seclusion as the best place for awakening.

As long as the bhikkhus hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. As long as they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. As long as they do not authorize ... but proceed according to what has been authorized by the rules of training ...; as long as they honour, respect, revere and salute the elders of long standing ...; as long as they do not fall prey to desires which arise in them and lead to rebirth ...; as long as they are devoted to forest lodgings ...; as long as they preserve their personal mindfulness, so that in future the good among their companions will come to them, and those who have already come will feel at ease with

them ...; as long as they hold to these seven things and are seen to do so, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. (D.16: 1.6)

So even in this reclusive position, the *samaṇa* is held to be practising rightly by presenting what the world in general doesn't present: harmonious decision-making meetings, respect, and living in a non-exploitative and peaceful relationship with nature.

In one of his striking similes, the Buddha likened the Dhamma to a snake: grasp it behind the head and you can handle it, grasp it by the tail and it will bite you.* 'Don't get lost in theories, and don't use your understanding for personal gain,' is the message. Instead, the teachings need to be tested against the template of suffering and its cessation in order to cut through speculative views and give true insight. After that, the words can be let go of. However, the Dhamma in its turn is supported by the Vinaya, and the evidence is that the Vinaya loses precedence whenever the Sangha becomes closely engaged in the politics of a given society. If unduly influenced by their supportive kings, the Sangha gets used to supporting their will. Nowadays, however, the kings have gone or have little power, and it is the State that is the slipperiest snake to manage.

**Alagadduppama Sutta* (M.22).



Greeting the World

As you settle into your embodiment, put aside any idea or familiar impression you may have of your body, and feel it from the inside through the breathing. Deepen the range of your breath-flow by opening your throat (as if you are about to swallow). This will help your diaphragm to relax so that your breathing is regulated by a centre much lower in your abdomen. This centre will become apparent at the end of the out-breath. Keeping your throat open, feel where the out-breath ends and, at that point, let your awareness spread back towards the lower spine.

This will help your awareness to deepen and include an energy that runs in line with the spine. Be with the breathing in this way, feeling this central upright axis. As you get more centred, widen your awareness to also discern the periphery, the edges of your body.

Bring up the sense of greeting; it may help to imagine greeting someone you know and are at ease with. It may be helpful to focus on the centre of your chest, as if you are looking out or receiving the world from that place. Stay centred and avoid reaching out to make contact. Let go of looking for anything special to contact or experience. Mostly your intention should be to get to know the greeting mode: how your body feels and how open, cautious, or eager you are to receive contact. Look for a calm openness that means you don't plunge into what arises, nor do you expect anything special from it.

This openness may be supported by giving attention to your auditory sense. Listen wide. When you get that sense of open listening, focus your bodily sense in the same way: not on any particular sensation,

but on the overall sense of being embodied, with the sense of being about to touch something subtle that's wrapped around you. Note, however, that this is not just about experiencing sensations – which may even be a distraction – but of sensing openness itself. There may be effects in your body; areas may soften, shift or expand and affect your mood.

Stay in this focus for a good while, settling and sampling it.

•••

Find a piece of natural or semi-natural ground, one that is shared with other life forms. Soften your visual focus. Walk slowly and after a couple of minutes, stand still for the duration of some deep, relaxed breaths, sampling your embodied space. Then walk for a few more minutes and then stop and stand again. This time, bring up the greeting sense and be where you are for at least five breaths.

Continue walking and standing. Notice whenever you go into an automatic mode: this will be marked by the sense of time and destination; or you might recognize a wish for purpose that also shuts down the open mode. Whenever this happens, stop and settle again, giving yourself ten breaths to do so.

Otherwise, walk for just a few (five or less) minutes, or until something catches your attention. Then pause, and clarify the details of the object with your vision or hearing; then come into your body and open into the greeting mode. Relax out of looking for anything. You may feel yourself deepen or soften; it's as if nature is cleaning and refreshing you.

Complete your formal session with a dedication, an extension through the greeting sense, or from the centre of your body, of goodwill out into the world around you, or to anything in particular that has caught your attention. Spend a few minutes doing this, externally and internally.



This meditation is easier and more comfortable in quiet and natural surroundings. You should use such situations whenever you can in order to develop the practice and its reference points. When these become established you will be able to carry them with you wherever you go. This will give you a stable but relaxed poise in the midst of activity. It will inform you directly of the sterile atmosphere of places that are devoid of life: even an empty office has no regenerative power. You will also be able to sense areas such as airports and shopping malls that, although seeming bright and cheerful, have no useful, and much unhelpful, energy in them. In such situations, put more emphasis on the upright axis of your body, which should include the soles of your feet. Walk at a regular unhurried pace and avoid getting pulled out through your eyes.

Being in the presence of trees and rivers is the opposite; they have a refreshing effect. In such situations, it's good to open the bodily sense and take in what's around you.

It's much the same with people. Groups who practise meditative presence provide strength and support; others provide noise and agitation. Bodily awareness helps you to know how to open or restrain your attention.

Part III

Nature, Dhamma and the State

‘BUT WHAT, SIRE, IS THE DUTY OF AN ARIYAN WHEEL-TURNING MONARCH?’ ...
‘YOURSELF DEPENDING ON THE DHAMMA, HONOURING IT, REVERING IT, CHERISHING
IT, DOING HOMAGE TO IT AND VENERATING IT, HAVING THE DHAMMA AS YOUR BADGE
AND BANNER, ACKNOWLEDGING THE DHAMMA AS YOUR MASTER, YOU SHOULD
ESTABLISH GUARD, WARD AND PROTECTION ACCORDING TO DHAMMA FOR YOUR
OWN HOUSEHOLD, YOUR TROOPS, YOUR NOBLES AND VASSALS, FOR BRAHMINS AND
HOUSEHOLDERS, TOWN AND COUNTRY FOLK, ASCETICS AND BRAHMINS, FOR BEASTS
AND BIRDS. LET NO CRIME PREVAIL IN YOUR KINGDOM, AND TO THOSE WHO ARE IN
NEED, GIVE PROPERTY.’

CAKKAVATTI SĪHANĀDA SUTTA (D.26: 5)

...THE ESSENTIAL PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT – IS TO SERVE AS THE TRUSTEE OF THE
COMMONS. THE COMMONS INCLUDES THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH, THE MINERALS
UNDER THE EARTH, THE WATER ON AND UNDER THE GROUND, THE RICHNESS OF
THE SOIL, THE ELECTROMAGNETIC SPECTRUM, THE PLANETARY GENOME, THE BIOTA
OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL ECOSYSTEMS, THE ATMOSPHERE, THE CENTURIES-LONG
ACCUMULATION OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY, AND THE ARTISTIC,
MUSICAL, AND LITERARY TREASURES OF OUR ANCESTORS. AS SOCIAL REFORMERS HAVE
OBSERVED FOR OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS, NO SINGLE PERSON CAN MAKE RIGHTFUL
CLAIM TO ANY OF THESE THINGS.¹

CHARLES EISENSTEIN



Imperial Dhamma

HAPPINESS IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT IS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN WITHOUT MUCH LOVE FOR THE DHAMMA, MUCH SELF-EXAMINATION, MUCH RESPECT, MUCH FEAR (OF EVIL), AND MUCH ENTHUSIASM. BUT THROUGH MY INSTRUCTION THIS REGARD FOR DHAMMA AND LOVE OF DHAMMA HAS GROWN DAY BY DAY, AND WILL CONTINUE TO GROW. AND MY OFFICERS OF HIGH, LOW AND MIDDLE RANK ARE PRACTISING AND CONFORMING TO DHAMMA, AND ARE CAPABLE OF INSPIRING OTHERS TO DO THE SAME. MAHAMATRAS IN BORDER AREAS ARE DOING THE SAME. AND THESE ARE MY INSTRUCTIONS: TO PROTECT WITH DHAMMA, TO MAKE HAPPINESS THROUGH DHAMMA AND TO GUARD WITH DHAMMA.

EMPEROR AŚOKA: PILLAR EDICT 1²

THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVES

Humans have the capacity and the need to operate collectively. As we do so, we gain an enormous potential to mould our biological environment: although land and weather have shaped us, increasingly we are shaping it. Religion, science and culture have all developed out of the interplay, challenges and promises of this process; and through them, the human collective has become a powerful force within the cosmos.

Collectives allow a number of individuals to approach a task – such as hunting a large animal, raising and educating children, or building a car on an assembly line – from different angles in order to obtain a desired result. Without forming cooperative groups millennia ago on the plains of Africa, we wouldn't have survived. The need to survive is one good reason to collaborate, but there are others. These amount to: the wish to develop knowledge and lore – i.e. to accumulate shared wisdom and test it out from a range of angles; and the wish to regenerate – i.e. while maintaining the know-how of the original members, to keep inducting new members, with their fresh energy and perspectives, into the group. Around these three principles, collectives such as an aboriginal tribe, the Buddhist Sangha, or Apple Inc., maintain their existence.

The environment of the collectives has changed: as foragers, we had to include the land, its creatures and its climate when considering our survival. The understanding of this interconnection is the basis of religion – the word 'religion' itself derives from the Latin for 'binding'. So with an acknowledgement of the living links between us and the forces of Creation, we sought assistance from whatever it was that created this powerful cosmos. Spirits and gods could be bears, mountains, the wind – or the spirits of the creatures we hunted. Not necessarily on our side, they had to be placated. So nature shaped us psychically – we were part of it. Moreover, the land shaped our actions: we followed many animals with predatory intent as they roamed, and we foraged to find where the edible plants were ripe or bearing fruit. We had very little property (too heavy to carry around) and wandered over a wide territory. In that way of life, knowledge was in terms of knowing the ways of nature, how to travel and how to operate within the group. Tradition was important; development wasn't a concept. Our collective keel was set in the Earth; we were included in it and had to steer through its forces.

This changed with agriculture as we settled into fixed territories. We still had to include the land, but now we shaped it. We cleared it of

trees and irrigated it. We cultivated food, which now came to us in the form of a few captive animals (goats, sheep, pigs, cows and chickens) and a handful of plants; so our relationship to wildlife changed. Now we had domestic animals that had to be defended against wild ones. As did the crops that we cultivated. So we learned to exclude: to kill wild creatures to protect the ones we kept in captivity; to fence the land and in due course to drench it (and the water and air) with pesticides. Being settled, we could hold more possessions, many of which were needed to cultivate the land. That also meant excluding others from access to our pile. In this condition, we could live in more dense populations, and that meant greater potential for cooperation, as well as for rivalry. Gods became humanoid warriors and judges; laws and statutes and states came into being. We traded our produce. Communication was needed to knit all this together, thus writing and numerical calculation arose, abstracting reality. To an increasing extent, we worked the Earth. As always, the priority was to sustain what had been learnt and pass on that knowledge to the next generation. To an increasing extent, the need to exclude others became part of that legacy.

An even bigger shift was urbanization: increased density, increased collective power, and increased need for governance. People became merchants; not just trading their produce locally, but travelling afar to sell goods that they hadn't made but purchased. Barter and money came into existence. Law and order within the collective was even more vital, to ensure that property and money were kept safe. Thus a firmer central authority (lord, king, emperor) was optimal; one based in towns and cities. As for the land: the builders of cities learned to drain the swamps and use the rivers as sewers and dumps for human waste. In a merchant's eyes, land and sea were perilous and had to be crossed. So merchants worshipped gods who lived in palaces and who could control nature and offer safe passage. Meanwhile, the kings/emperors formed an alliance with the will of Heaven. And as trade grew, that meant greater communication and an interest in faster and more effective means of travelling and handling finance. Thus,

III.1

Buddhist Governance

'As long as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. As long as they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.'

'As long as they do not authorise what has not been authorised already, and do not abolish what has been authorised, but proceed according to what has been authorised by the rules of training ...; as long as they honour, respect, revere and salute the elders of long standing who are long ordained, fathers and leaders of the order ...; as long as they do not fall prey to desires which arise in them and lead to rebirth ...; as long as they are devoted to forest-lodgings ...; as long as they preserve their personal mindfulness, so that in future the good among their companions will come to them, and those who have already come will feel at ease with them ...; as long as the monks hold to these seven things and are seen to do so, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.'

(D.16: 1.6)

The Ten Rājadhamma, duties of a wise ruler

Giving, generosity (*dāna*)

Virtuous conduct (*sīla*)

Self-sacrifice (*pariccāga*)

Honesty and Integrity (*ājjava*)

Gentleness (*maddava*)

Self-control (*tapa*)

Non-anger, calmness (*akkhoda*)

Non-violence, non-oppression (*avihiṃsā*)

Patience, forbearance (*khanti*)

Living in accordance with Dhamma

(*avorodhana*)

(Jāt. V 378)

•••

The Seven Principles of the Vajjian Republic

('only growth is to be expected for them, not decline')

1. They held frequent public meetings of their tribe.
2. They met together to make their decisions and carried out their undertakings in concord.
3. They didn't abolish long-term principles and they honoured their pledges.
4. They respected and supported their elders.
5. They ensured the safety and protection of women and girls.
6. They maintained and paid due respect to their places of worship.
7. They supported and fully protected arahants/spiritual leaders.

(D.16: 1.4)

with competition, development became an issue: caravans, ships, and roads spread out; banks handled transactions; know-how attuned to finding new markets and better deals as competition became part of trade. Knowledge, wealth and power nestled in the cities; people of the land were considered backwards; the nomadic lifestyle was marginalised or eliminated. People were thrown off the land and into cities as it was removed from common usage and transferred

to minority ownership. To an increasing extent, the network of wealth, knowledge and power fostered the cross-cultural exchange of knowledge, but the centre left the land. Meanwhile, those outside the network (often because they wanted to be free of the central authority) were ‘pagans’, ‘barbarians’, and ‘savages’ – the ranks of the excluded continued to swell.

Industrialization was based on devices powered by non-sentient means, so goodbye horse, and welcome non-stop engine! Power and wealth were not only urbanized but also further removed people from organic life and rhythms. Darkness could be dispelled by electricity; more people were drawn from the land, and human life moved to the predictable rhythm of the working day, measured by the clock. Science brought the concept of rapid and constant development with it. Wherever a controlling deity was still held to exist, their role was to support the central authority. As for the Earth: paved over, it disappeared from daily contact. It became abstract: either a globe to be travelled, or a place *apart* from where we live, a resource for raw materials or for recreation, divided into territories entered by means of a visa. Our abiding place was located in the virtual realities of clock time and citizenship. Provided that you belonged to the ‘wealth, knowledge and power’ group, there were many advantages to all this in terms of social welfare, but ways of life and forms of knowledge that connected humans to the Earth died out or were eliminated.

Nowadays, if you’re not associated with the urban-industrial lifestyle, the prospects aren’t good. Along this trajectory, there has been a development from tribes to states and empires – a movement that offers increased power. In line with this, the mechanism we call ‘the State’ – an authority that supervises ‘us’ through laws, civil servants and police – has become the norm. But the mechanism also operates at a level above that of the territory-based nation-state: to a large degree the wealth, knowledge and power that lead humanity are held in transnational bodies: the World Bank, NATO, ASEAN and so on. Inaccessible to the vast majority of the population, these bodies yet have authority over us.

DHAMMA AS WORLD-ORDER

After establishing a collective for his nomadic disciples, the Buddha never authorised a single central leader for the Sangha, saying that the Dhamma-Vinaya would be its guide. He did meet and parlay with the kings of his age, who all paid him due respect. But he spoke highly of the republican model of the Licchavi republic and never sought royal sponsorship. Such backing came on its own. The most significant of these royal sponsors arose after the Buddha's decease in the figure of Aśoka Maurya (r. 270-232 BCE), ruler of an empire that straddled much of what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Although Aśoka's empire is often called 'Buddhist', it was primarily aligned to Dhamma as a cosmic moral order rather than as a path to nibbāna. We can see this from the policy statements that Aśoka's followers had carved in stone on large rock slabs and pillars throughout his empire. These edicts exhibit an ethos of wide-ranging compassion and concern. As with the following:

Everywhere has Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals. (from Rock Edict 2)

and

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honours as much as he values this – that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religion of others without good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way. But it is better to honour other religions for this reason. By so doing, one's

own religion benefits, and so do other religions, while doing otherwise harms one's own religion and the religions of others. Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought 'Let me glorify my own religion,' only harms his own religion. Therefore contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions. (from Rock Edict 12)

and

In the past there were no Dhamma Mahamatras but such officers were appointed by me thirteen years after my coronation. Now they work among all religions for the establishment of Dhamma, for the promotion of Dhamma, and for the welfare and happiness of all who are devoted to Dhamma. They work among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Gandharas, the Rastrikas, the Pitinikas and other peoples on the western borders. They work among soldiers, chiefs, Brahmans, householders, the poor, the aged and those devoted to Dhamma – for their welfare and happiness – so that they may be free from harassment. They [Dhamma Mahamatras] work for the proper treatment of prisoners, towards their unfettering, and if the Mahamatras think, 'This one has a family to support,' 'That one has been bewitched,' 'This one is old,' then they work for the release of such prisoners. (from Rock Edict 5)

The first of these edicts was deciphered and translated by James Prinsep in 1837; but it took until 1915 and the discovery of dynastic lists to connect 'Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi' to one 'Aśoka', a figure who appears in the ancient Sri Lankan Chronicles and in two Indian works of legendary nature, the second-century *Divyavadana* and *Aśokavadana*. Although these works mix legend with history, the consensus was that Aśoka (= 'Sorrowless') had been a typical warrior king, but after a bloody war with the Kalingas, he had converted to Buddhism. The following confession, carved in stone, confirmed that this was the case:

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for instruction in Dhamma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.

Indeed, Beloved-of-the-Gods is deeply pained by the killing, dying and deportation that take place when an unconquered country is conquered. But Beloved-of-the-Gods is pained even more by this – that Brahmins, ascetics, and householders of different religions who live in those countries, and who are respectful to superiors, to mother and father, to elders, and who behave properly and have strong loyalty towards friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, servants and employees – that they are injured, killed or separated from their loved ones. Even those who are not affected (by all this) suffer when they see friends, acquaintances, companions and relatives affected. These misfortunes befall all (as a result of war), and this pains Beloved-of-the-Gods ...

Now Beloved-of-the-Gods thinks that even those who do wrong should be forgiven where forgiveness is possible. (from Rock Edict 13)

Further inscriptions indicate that this reformed conqueror had carried out the last injunction with persistence. Pillar Edict 5 mentions as a footnote: *'In the twenty-six years since my coronation, prisoners have been given amnesty on twenty-five occasions.'*

To have had such sentiments carved in stone and placed around his empire indicates some major points: that he meant these professions and instructions to be seen as his enduring intention; that, given the plurality of languages in the empire, and a low literacy rate, there must have been a good system of local government whose officials (presumably the Dhamma Mahamatras) could refer to these edicts and explain them to the common folk; and that they presented an ethical alignment to the cosmos. In terms

of a policy statement, public notices and a bureaucracy to enact the policy, here are the outlines of the modern State; in terms of ethics, they also establish a collective mentality called ‘the nation’.

THE RIGHTEOUS MONARCH

Evidence of Aśoka’s alignment is his favoured term of address: ‘Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi’. Translated more literally, its message is even clearer: ‘He to whom the gods are affectionate, king of affectionate regard’. The reference is to the sacred order of the cosmos, and the relationship is one of *piya*: ‘affection’. This is not the more sublime *mettā-karuṇā* of the Buddha, but a familial, intimate emotion; a sense of belonging. At times, his insistence on this almost amounts to a plea:

All men are my children. What I desire for my own children, and I desire their welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, that I desire for all men. You do not understand to what extent I desire this, and if some of you do understand, you do not understand the full extent of my desire. (Kalinga Rock Edict 1)

Why? As an emperor he had no need to win people over to gain votes. Such proclamations, including those that state that people can visit him with petitions at any time, can only be seen as issuing from genuine conscience, and an intent not just to rule, but to steward a nation by referring to the supernatural aspects of the cosmos. This was in accord with the ancient principle that, for the welfare of the nation, it was the duty of the king to maintain a good relationship with the gods. However, Aśoka did this, not by claiming divinity for himself (as some emperors did), but through practising personal integrity. This is in line with the Buddha’s understanding that the ethical conduct of the just king (rather than ritual and sacrifice) is a crucial condition for the harmony of the cosmos and the fertility of the land:

... when kings are righteous, the royal vassals are righteous ... the brahmins and householders become righteous ... the sun and moon

States of Happiness

The Happy Planet Index (happyplanetindex.org), developed by the New Economics Foundation in the UK, compares life satisfaction, longevity, inequality and ecological footprints in 140 countries across the world. Countries that exemplify economic development are some of the worst performers in sustainable well-being. Out of a total of 140 countries, the USA is in 108th place, below Namibia at 103rd; China is 72nd; Japan is 58th; Britain is 34th.

EXAMPLES FROM THE INDEX

The **USA** (108) scores low on account of economic inequality and ecological footprint (137th place). Poverty has increased as a result of the recession in 2008; in 2010, 1 in 6 Americans lived below the poverty line. It has the fourth largest ecological footprint of all 140 countries included in the rankings. Having backed out of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the USA re-joined UN-led efforts to tackle climate change in 2007 and 2010. It has since taken a hard line on what is required by much poorer countries in terms of tackling climate change, while resisting ambitious commitments for its own emission reductions. In 2015, the Obama administration committed the USA to the international agreement on a global policy to combat climate change. In 2017, the Trump administration withdrew from that agreement.

VANUATU (4) is a small island nation to the east of Queensland, Australia. It has been

consistently democratic and peaceful despite its immense cultural diversity (over 100 languages are spoken). Its people have higher well-being than those living in Japan, while Vanuatu's ecological footprint is just a quarter of the size of Japan's. In Vanuatu, tight-knit social communities meet often to discuss community matters – from conflict resolution to ceremonial planning. The country is well placed to make use of renewables, with hydropower, wind, solar and coconut bio-fuel abundant. In 2011, 34% of the energy Vanuatu consumed came from renewables, and the country aims to be powered by 100% renewable energy by 2030.

COSTA RICA (1) abolished its army in 1949, and has since reallocated army funds to be spent on education, health and pensions. In 2012, Costa Rica invested more in education and health as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product than the UK. Professor Mariano Rojas, a Costa Rican economist at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, attributes Costa Ricans' high well-being to a culture of forming solid social networks of friends, families and neighbourhoods.

The Costa Rican government uses taxes collected on the sale of fossil fuels to pay for the protection of forests. In 2015, the country was able to produce 99% of its electricity from renewable sources, and the government continues to invest in renewable energy generation in an effort to meet its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2021.

OTHER NOTES

Bhutan has designated more than 50% of its land area as protected national parks and biological corridors. More than 80% of the country is covered by natural forests, and it has a reforestation program aimed at increasing this figure. Consequently, it stores more than twice the carbon than it emits.

(grossnationalhappiness.com/2017/01/2015-gnh-survey-report)

In 2010, Bolivia produced a draft ‘Law of Mother Earth’, centred around the rights of nature. These include: the right not to have cellular structure modified or genetically altered [as in GM crops]; the right to continue

vital cycles and processes free from human alteration; the right to pure water; the right to clean air; the right to be free of toxic and radio-active pollution; and the right not to be affected by mega-infrastructure and development projects that affect the balance of ecosystems and the local inhabitant communities.

Outlining the state’s responsibility to support the national environment, it adds that ‘Neither living systems nor processes that sustain them may be commercialized, nor serve as anyone’s private property.’

Polly Higgins: *Earth is our Business* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2012)

proceed on course ... seasons and years are on course, the winds blow on course and dependably, the gods are not upset, sufficient rain falls, the crops ripen in season ...’ [and the converse]. (A.4: 170)

Aśoka may well have been directed by his monastic teacher to discourses on virtuous kingship such as the *Kūṭadaṇṭa Sutta* (D.5), the *Mahāsudassana Sutta* (D.17) and the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (D.26) – narratives in which respective kings distribute wealth to their subjects, commit to the five moral precepts and practise renunciation. He might very well have studied the *Jātaka* – the fables depicting the previous lives of the Buddha (some as an animal) during which he perfected *pāramī*. These exemplary tales widen the sphere of the Buddha’s lineage to include animals, and they also illustrate a list of the ethical duties (*rajadhammā*) of a Righteous Monarch towards his subjects, that is: Generosity, Virtuous Conduct, Self-sacrifice, Honesty and Integrity, Gentleness, Self-control, Calmness, Non-violence and Non-oppression, Forbearance, and Living in Accordance with Dhamma. Thus Dhamma practice is presented as spreading over the wide cosmos and providing it with an ethical axis.

The evidence that we have indicates that Aśoka attempted to carry out these Dhamma-duties. He supported monasteries, granted amnesty to prisoners, and refrained from warfare. His only daughter and one of his sons entered the Sangha and took the Dhamma to Sri Lanka. No one can fault his commitment. Or the detail of his attention: while avowing almost complete vegetarianism for himself, he banned hunting and created veterinary clinics. In Pillar Edict 5, he listed over twenty species (including bats and queen ants) that are to be protected, while domestic animals are to be protected when they are nursing their young. *‘Cocks are not to be caponized, husks hiding living beings are not to be burnt and forests are not to be burnt either without reason or to kill creatures. One animal is not to be fed to another ...’*

As a final touch, even with all the proclamations and with holding sway over a vast territory, there is the example of his modesty. For instance, none of his edicts are commands: they are statements of his actions and intentions. Also note that although engraved coinage was in circulation, none have been found bearing his image. Nor are there any statues of Aśoka. Skilled craftsman were available – witness the fine workmanship of a lion capital that crowned one of the pillars, and the Wheel of Dependent Arising, both carved in stone. But the only image that we (probably) have of the emperor is in the gate at the Sanchi stupa. In one of the panels, a small, pot-bellied man with a headdress is leaning unsteadily, being supported by a number of women. Could this be Aśoka? He had the stupa built, so who else would be engraved on a stone at the gate? But the figure is dwarfed by his (presumed) wives and seemingly frail. Such a depiction is an emblem of devotion and humility. Another aspect of this is revealed in one edict, when dropping the ‘Beloved-of-the-Gods’ title, he addresses the Bhikkhu Sangha as to the longevity of the Buddha-Dhamma, although for once he positions himself as their advisor (respectfully, of course):

Piyadasi, King of Magadha, saluting the Sangha and wishing them good health and happiness, speaks thus: You know, reverend sirs, how great my faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and Sangha is. Whatever, reverend

sirs, has been spoken by Lord Buddha, all that is well-spoken. I consider it proper, reverend sirs, to advise on how the good Dhamma should last long. (Minor Rock Edict 3)

Aśoka was a Buddhist, but not a zealot. There are encouragements to honour religious people, and he apparently sent, or encouraged, Buddhist missions to other countries. He also arranged for a synod in which the rival lineages of the time could resolve their differences (they didn't; a parting of the ways was the result). Although he valued and supported the Sangha, no commands were issued to support it. Moreover, the Dhamma that he advocated for the nation wasn't exclusively Buddhist – the edicts mention 'Dhamma' many times, but the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Arising do not appear; the recommendation is of 'not praising one's own religion' and it being 'better to honour other religions.' In these terms, Aśoka was following and codifying the mode of previous kings, one that continued in India through the Kushan, Satavahana, Gupta, Harshan and Pala dynasties. In the absence of monotheist absolutism, each individual's faith was a personal matter, not an affair of the State. The tolerance of religious differences was the norm.

So, although Aśoka's personal convictions were Buddhist, his public statement on Dhamma advocated *śīladhamma*, moral order:

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Dhamma is good, but what constitutes Dhamma? (It includes) little evil, much good, kindness, generosity, truthfulness and purity. (Pillar Edict 2)*

THE AŚOKAN MODEL

Although Aśoka's empire only survived for fifty years after his death, its lasting significance is that his is the model of Buddhist kingship, the example against which subsequent rulers in the Buddhist world

*The 'little evil' suggests that Aśoka was also aware of the tarnish of worldly power. After all, there was the matter of the death of over 100,000 Kalingans... Plus the murder of a brother or two to gain access to the throne... Perhaps recognizing that nibbāna was out of the reach of kings, it is always to a higher birth that he aspired.

from Japan to Tibet and Sri Lanka have measured themselves. What is presented in his edicts is the State as servant and steward of the nation, the 'we' that can be subjectively sensed through ethics and mutuality. The Aśokan nation was held to include its lands, its animals, and all its people. As for governance: the size of his empire (which lacked modern communications and mechanized transport), and the reference to the Mahamatras suggest that this must have been one of local communities overseeing their affairs within the ethical framework. The Aśokan model therefore is one that limits the role of the central authority to one of establishing guiding principles. Significantly (and thankfully as it turns out), Aśoka's Dhamma directives weren't exclusively Buddhist, but something that a number of religious inclinations could assent to.

Both the State and the Sangha have moved on since those days, but there are timeless key requirements for any healthy human collectives. These include the establishment and preservation of the principles that deal with the unchanging conditions of the world – such as that we all have to sicken and die, we all seek food and shelter, and we all depend on each other and the planet. In respect of these, the collective has to be cooperative, responsible and sharing. It needs a collective mentality that holds values and shared meaning, 'internal' qualities; such qualities being encoded in the unchanging forms of tradition, culture and myth. In addition to this, for the collective to form, it has to know itself through direct person-to-person contact or open, responsive communication. It also has to guard against the influence of gain, renown and power, by distributing these and checking against absolutism and individual supremacy. These are 'external' features that are held by laws, councils and ministers. These have to develop, adapt, and flex to meet new situations as they arise. The internal development forms a nation, the external the State. As they are approaching the collective from different perspectives, tensions arise, and ongoing mediation

is the requirement for harmony and growth. As with the Buddha's injunction to the Sangha to *'meet in harmony ... and carry on their business in harmony'*.

ต้นไม้เป็นอย่างไร ... เธอก็เป็น

What are trees like?

Well, we're just the same.



State, Nation and Nature

‘THE ONONDAGA WANT WHAT EVERYONE IN ONONDAGA COUNTY WANTS,’ SAID CANDEE WADSWORTH FROM NEIGHBORS OF THE ONONDAGA NATION. ‘WE ALL WANT THE TOXIC WASTE SITES CLEANED UP. WE WANT WATER CLEAN ENOUGH TO SWIM IN, THAT HOSTS FISH SAFE ENOUGH TO EAT. AND AIR THAT YOU CAN BREATHE WITHOUT HOLDING YOUR NOSE. WHY WON’T NEW YORK STATE JOIN US IN THIS EFFORT?’

THE ONONDAGA NATION, WHOSE HOME IS LOCATED JUST SOUTH OF SYRACUSE, FILED THEIR LAND RIGHTS ACTION IN MARCH OF 2005. THE SUIT IS ASKING THE FEDERAL COURT TO DECLARE THAT IT WAS ILLEGAL FOR NEW YORK STATE TO TAKE ONONDAGA LANDS AND THAT THE TITLE TO THAT REGION CONTINUES TO BELONG TO THE ONONDAGA NATION. THE ONONDAGA SUIT SEEKS ‘JUSTICE AND HEALING,’ AND THE NATION WILL NOT SETTLE FOR A CASINO. THE NATION HAS PLEDGED NOT TO EVICT OR DISPLACE NEW YORKERS WHO CURRENTLY LIVE IN THEIR HISTORIC TERRITORY, APPROXIMATELY ONE TENTH OF NEW YORK STATE THAT WAS TAKEN ILLEGALLY 200+ YEARS AGO.³

STATES, EMPIRES AND NATIONS

Having a centralised authority govern a collective offers the benefits of internal coherence, order and efficiency. However, this also offers power, fame and wealth to whoever occupies the centre; along with rivalries, corruption and assassinations. Hence the Buddha wisely established his Sangha’s governance on law and consensus rather than

by an individual leader. Aimed at excluding unwholesome influences, the Sangha was otherwise inclusive and accepted applicants from all walks of life; within it, caste boundaries were dropped. Its boundaries were held by collective governance, in meetings that were and still are held in tandem with a fortnightly recitation of its moral code. Any new situations, such as whether driving cars is allowable, can be adjudicated through referring to the great standards (*mahapadesa*). These state that if a new item or action is in line with what is already allowed, then it is to be allowed: if not, not. The authorities to refer to are (in descending order of validity) the word of the Buddha, the judgment of the entire Sangha, the judgment of a group of elders, and the judgment of a single elder. Occasional meetings at local, national and international levels have provided ongoing clarification in times of dispute. In this way, the Sangha has maintained its longevity.

By and large the mechanism of the State has developed more erratically along similar lines, but with less ethical integrity and with power grabs by individuals and sub-groups being a common feature. Legal structures, a constitution and a collegiate form of government help to diffuse the power; these also perpetuate any state beyond the death of a leader, and guard against his or her lapses into incompetence. But states are mechanisms. As such, they are impersonal and can continue irrespective of the specific people they involve; they breed a governing elite, members of which can die or retire – and be replaced. People may emigrate or immigrate and the state continues. The overriding principle of the State is not to effect a harmonious abiding in the cosmos, but to hold territory and authority over the people within its boundaries. Accordingly, its governing ministers form an elite that stands apart from the people. It's never the case now that the leader of the state fights alongside the soldiers, works with the workers, nurses the sick, or teaches the children. So although a state has the advantage of being impersonal and long

lived, it loses reference to the collective mentality and materiality of its people, and in fact to the living tissues of the planet it occupies.

States form out of royal marriages, or through alliances between existing governments, or are suddenly conceived by the conquest of a territory. Over the past 500 years, many people in Eastern Europe have found themselves to belong successively to Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine without leaving their farms and fields. Such forced inclusion has been the norm: in the era of European expansion many states were created out of indigenous national territories, by drawing boundaries around (America, Australia) or between (Middle East) them. By such means a state grows, absorbing people as it does so, into an empire, a body that encompasses a collection of disparate nations, languages and ethnicities – while the head sits elsewhere. In its day, the British Empire extended around the entire planet, swallowing territory by means of trading agreements and military incursions; or by simply landing on a beach, or sailing a ship around some land and claiming it for the British Crown – irrespective of the wishes or opinions of the local inhabitants. As is the case with empires, the consequent colonials were subjugated and required to fight in the wars of the mother country – the absent head that governed the colony’s resources and marginalised the native people.

After the disgracing of the European empires, the word ‘empire’ has fallen out of favour, but the structure – a central government controlling disparate peoples – would today fit Russia, China, the USA, India and Indonesia. Economic empires such as the European Union bear similarities. The bigger the collective, the greater the pooling of the resources of wealth, knowledge and power. The gathering is secular in its motivation, and held intact by such means: states and empires rely upon law, councils, police and soldiers to enforce the governing will and suppress rebellion if necessary. Partly because of the need for a civil service, and partly because leaders want to fulfil their personal desires, the collective resources of the State or Empire aren’t equally

III.3 *Dhammic Environmentalism*

'The Balance of Nature in the environment is achieved and regulated by the functions of the forest. Hence the survival of the forest is essential to the survival of *silatham* [*sīladhamma* = moral balance] in our environment. It is all interdependent. When we protect the forest we protect the world. When we destroy that Balance, causing drastic changes in global weather and soil conditions, causing severe hardship to the people [*sic*] ... Thus the forest is the creator of environmental *silatham*, ensuring a healthy harmony in people's lives both physically and mentally.'

'If we fail to bring back true *sīladhamma*, our country will not survive ... The true basis of Buddhism is wisdom – the knowledge and understanding of the true worth of nature

according to the Natural Law which is Truth. The Natural Law applies to all life that must still concern itself with the material world, that still must do its duty in and towards society.'

'Dhamma, the Buddhist word for truth and teachings, is also the word for Nature. This is because they are the same. Nature is the manifestation of truth and of the teachings. When we destroy Nature we destroy the truth and the teachings. When we protect Nature, we protect the truth and the teachings.'

Ajahn Pongsak

from *Buddhism and Ecology*: eds. Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994)

distributed but channelled towards the governing elite. It distributes them as it sees fit. Slavery, class division and gender inequality have been the norm since the time of Akkad or Ancient Egypt.

The Nation differs from the State in that it is a gathering around meaning and myth, an 'internal' mental construct. The very word 'nation' derives from the same root as 'nature' and 'nativity'; it refers to a shared birthplace, or birthright, or, in its fullest sense, of belonging to a living and interrelating whole. Although this includes territory, outsiders gain inclusion not by crossing a border but by adopting internal human realities such as values, language, and customs. Whereas a state is 'it', a nation is 'us'. Accordingly, the most severe punishment that such a collective can impose on a miscreant is exclusion. This amounts to a virtual 'death' of the spirit.*

*Increasingly severe degrees of exclusion from communion are the heaviest form of punishment that a sangha can impose on ill-behaved members. Most famously, Channa, the proud and disruptive bhikkhu who had once been the Bodhisatta's charioteer, immediately reformed his ways at the very mention that he was liable to be penalised in this way.

Because a crucial aspect of the nation (and the cosmos) is placed on a mythic-meaning plane, any successful management has to take that aspect into account. So the State has to refer not just to its mechanisms, but to the collective mentality. Or at least some of it. Particularly in times of crisis or during elections in what is called 'democracy', the State adopts or fabricates a secularised 'nationalist' mythology and appeals to populist exclusive sentiment, using flag, slogans, or history. The hybrid entity, the 'nation-state', then becomes a basis from which to proclaim the distinctions (and the superior qualities) of 'us' with regard to 'them'.

PEOPLE OF THE LAND

In pre-industrial societies, principles and values were established through negotiation with the sacred powers of this world and the next. This mythic element was inclusive; it aimed to keep the human collective in line with the rest of the cosmos. In a few places, such cultures still exist. Wade Davis, a Canadian anthropologist, writes of the Barasana people of the Colombian Amazon; a vestige, he considers, of a culture that existed throughout the entire Amazon region until incoming European colonists devastated it with disease:

For the people living today in the forests of the Piraparana, the entire natural world is saturated with meaning and cosmological significance. Every rock and waterfall embodies a story. Plants and animals are but distinct physical manifestations of the same essential spiritual essence.

At the same time, everything is more than it appears, for the visible world is only one level of perception. Behind every tangible form, every plant and animal, is a shadow dimension, a place invisible to ordinary people but visible to the shaman. This is the realm of the *He* spirits, a world of deified ancestors where rocks and rivers are alive, plants and animals are human beings, sap and blood the bodily fluids of the primordial river of the anaconda

It is to the realm of the *He* spirits that the shaman goes in ritual. Contrary to popular lore in the West, the shaman of the Barasana never uses or

manipulates medicinal plants. His duty and sacred task is to move in the timeless realm of the *He*, embrace the primordial powers, and harness and restore the energy of all creation. He is like a modern engineer who enters the depths of a nuclear reactor to renew the entire cosmic order.

... Human beings, plants, and animals share the same cosmic origins, and in a profound sense are seen as essentially identical, responsive to the same principles, obligated by the same duties, responsible for the collective well-being of creation. There is no separation between nature and culture. Without the forest and the rivers, humans would perish. But without people, the natural world would have no order or meaning. All would be chaos. ... Everything is related, everything connected, a single integrated whole. Mythology infuses land and life with meaning, encoding expectations and behaviours essential to survival in the forest, anchoring each community ... to a profound spirit of place.⁴

One of the other laws of this nation was that marriage should be with someone from another tribe, who spoke a different language. This widening of the 'we' sense helped to mediate against exclusivity.

Put aside the icons and the beliefs: simply note that the binding of any nation occurs through a mythic sense, and is activated by ritual that includes the land and its creatures. When the collective mentality is based on inclusion, the myth includes human consciousness and the rest of the biosphere. True or not? Well, the result of respecting that psychic/mythic level of perception is that limitations were established on hunting certain animals and on fishing designated stretches of the river. And the crucial human act and responsibility (via the shaman) was held to be one of wise stewardship.* In brief, to

*As with, for example, the Mbuti pygmies of West Africa who operate in accordance with strictly observed laws. These protect certain animals, such as the gorilla, from being hunted, and ban all hunting during the dry season – when the animals give birth. Transgression of these laws results in 'death' – i.e. exclusion from the tribe.

It has also been argued that allowing indigenous people to be custodians of land is economically sound. Rather than spend hundreds of billions on carbon capture, or hiring forest wardens, allowing people of the land to manage the land that they live on, by preserving the forest, allows nature to capture carbon – for free.

be of the land, not to 'own' it. Perhaps that is a valuable and valuing level of perception to access.

Moreover, people of the land were not void of rationality; they were quite capable of differentiating the mythic from the sensory. Wade Davis also writes of the finely-tuned intelligence of the Polynesian mariners who were trained from childhood to navigate the catamarans across the trackless ocean through reading the stars, the water, slight changes in wind and the movements of birds and fish. The Khoisan hunters of South Africa have an almost supernatural capacity to track wildlife, based on careful attention to grass, odours, and subtle marks in the earth. Any of these tasks, and more, the average unlanded person would be completely incapable of doing. Some of us can barely get from one town to the next without a GPS device. So, to a significant degree, our intelligence is 'not-self'; universally given, it is shaped by the environment in which we live.

Tribes and nations throughout history have survived the loss of statehood, from the Jews to the people of Saxon England after the Norman Conquest, to the people of eighteenth-century Poland, to the Baltic people under Prussian domination, to the nations of South Africa under apartheid. What was vital for their survival was right relationship: to each other, to their culture and the land. The above people retained those links. However, in the case of the indigenous tribes and nations of North America and Australia, the takeover went deeper: the State not only took their land and curtailed their nomadic lifestyle – in many cases it also removed their children and placed them in institutions in order to eradicate their cultural roots and assimilate them into the mainstream. The individual and social results of being deprived of land, culture and parents at the same time (and in many cases being physically and sexually abused) cannot be adequately covered in one paragraph. Suffice it to say that it was far worse than that suffered by the 'black' peoples under apartheid – who retained their culture, their children and even to some degree,

their land.* And the ignorance continues: as the Australian government overruled the majority of Norfolk Islanders in 2015 to revoke the island's autonomy, Lisle Snell, the islander's chief minister, summed it up: *'We don't see property as a commodity. We are caretakers of the land – we are nothing without our land.'*

'We are nothing': for the Aboriginal people of Australia, the land was part of 'us', it was kept potent by human prayer; and that ensured that the people lived rightly. The aspect of the immaterial realm that I'm calling 'mythic', was deeply intertwined with the material realm. In this bond, the human responsibility was to *walk* the land, respect its spirits, and, by reciting its songs, keep bringing it in line with the mythic Dreamtime. As a Maori man once explained to me: some of his ancestors were gods, some were mountains, some had human bodies. This sounds like primitive madness: mountains do not give birth to human bodies. But if you reflect more deeply... Mountains create streams and moderate wind and rain – and that creates an environment for trees ... that clean and refresh the air and support the soil and wildlife – what kind of human could exist without this supportive environment? Moreover, if we understand 'gods' to be the icons of the collective myth, and hence at the origins of national culture ... then we are all descended from mountains and gods as well as from our human ancestors.

In fact, any nation has a mythic basis; it embeds gods, heroes, and legends into a terrestrial location and so merges it with the psyche of the people. Thus a 'locus of meaning' is established – as with Jerusalem, Mount Kailas, Mecca and a thousand sacred wells, springs, mountains and pilgrimage routes that are otherwise just geography. This locus doesn't necessarily conform to the boundaries of the State. And it's not 'owned property' that you can carve up and dispose of as you like, any more than you can carve up your grandfather – without destroying his (and part of your) life. How can you own something

*This difference is at least partly due to religious influence: the Victorian Evangelists of Britain and America felt it was their duty to save the souls of the native people by ridding them of their heathen ways; the Calvinists of South Africa regarded anyone non-white as damned already, and hence didn't bother.

that you didn't create? And then assume you can do what you like with it? The relationship of 'owning' is already a wrong view; it eliminates mutuality, trashes the imaginative bond, and partitions the cosmos. The owned object is treated as if it were dead; then the heartlessness and the abuse begin. 'Owning' also means removal from common access and use; in other words, dispossession. This 'tragedy of the commons' has become the norm for the modern state.*

RIGHT RULE: ALIGNMENT TO THE COSMOS

Collectives need management. Our species is powerful and susceptible to dangerous degrees of ignorance; it therefore needs a wise orientation and steering. In brief, an ethics-based mutuality, proceeding as much through the heart-base of myth as through law, has to grow between people, and between us and other creatures. That is, rather than seeing an increasingly vulnerable cosmos as a collection of exploitable objects, our concern and respect has to widen into greater inclusivity. This is the function of religion. As aboriginal people hunted the megafauna to extinction, animism developed protocols and taboos that placed limits on hunting. Culture also had to develop: on account of intertribal warfare, collectives would meet and spend time together in ritual mythic space – often to the accompaniment of singing and dancing their shared meaning. Out of a ritual web, a precarious harmony could grow and be maintained.

The State operates in a different way. It operates from the centre in a top-down manner. It might assemble a domain out of the territory of several nations or tribal bodies, establishing an entity on the secular-material plane rather than refer to the cosmos as a whole. Its power extends down through government bodies, which themselves may use bureaucratic procedures that are inaccessible to the average person. Hence there is a tension between the people and the State,

*In the UK, as a result of the Enclosure legislation and the Highland Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries, 65% of the land is now owned by 0.36% of the population, with 80% of the people living on the urbanized 5%.⁵

one that makes rebellion a constant possibility. Historically, this threat has been dealt with by offering social and material advantages to some and by including people into the governing process to a degree. Failing that, force can be used, but when a people are spread over inaccessible or remote areas that has proved difficult. Nomads and people of the wilderness therefore represent a threat.

Democracy has arisen out of the need to bond a people to the State by means of a degree of inclusion and through reference to national principles. An early example of this, admiringly mentioned in the Buddhist suttas, is that of the Vajjian republic. Yes, but that was arrived at through consultation among the male members of the noble clan only [see Panel 3.1]. So, a partial exclusivity. Greek democracy offered no wider mandate. Even the eighteenth-century Constitution of the United States established principles of equality, freedom and a representational form of government – to white men only. Women, blacks and the entire indigenous population of America were not consulted or included in the contract.

Slowly and through a mix of collective protest and principled leaders, we do learn. And as constitutions and the legal system developed and expanded, the general trend has been to widen the scope to guarantee some rights to more of the people. This inclusive process came rather late in many cases: it wasn't until 1924 that the United States granted citizenship to Native Americans; it took until 1967 for the Australian government to declare Aboriginal and Torres Islanders to be citizens of Australia. Prior to that, these people hadn't even figured on a census. In 1985, the New Zealand government instigated a Land Tribunal to adjudicate over land claims made by Maori people and return land to Maori ownership that had been illegally taken by the European settlers; Australia finally granted native title rights in 1992. The USA has so far not offered the return of land stolen from its native people.

Economic pressure, greed for land, claims of entitlement, and the myth of the supremacy of the 'white' sub-group continue to

contribute to this narrative of abuse. This is because with supremacy comes the sense of inferiority and exclusivity. This notion also informs the relationship with the biosphere; largely ignored when the constitutions were drawn up, it wasn't considered as much more than property to be administered, used or disposed of. Tellingly, when the United States took form, its mythic basis was the Puritanical world-view of the Just and the Righteous, whose God gave them dominion over the Earth. In this seventeenth-century model, all things, living or otherwise, became objects, subject to clinging, possession, and exploitation. This paradigm continues to the present day: its most recent version is the neo-liberal view that took over the global economy in the 1980s. In this view, the market and cost are held to be the central governing principles; land, biota and people are commodities. Our internal realities are to be excluded. Yet the power of this global economy is such that it moderates government rather than the other way round. The locus of meaning has become a place in the economic global order.

For its part, the economic order has acquired transnational power; a mega-corporation may have greater resources than a small nation and exercise huge leverage over taxation and the right to use the Earth. When an agro-business patents its seeds, it modifies nature's plants to make them its property; oil and mining corporations purchase the rights to kill the land for the purposes of extraction. And a corporation needs growth to keep its shareholders happy and to pay off the research and exploration costs it accumulates through trying to stay ahead of other mega-corporations. The result is a global Superstate dominated by oligarchs and the corporate elite – who are not responsible to the majority of the people whose land and state mechanisms they use, and whose ethos is competition rather than mutuality. The rest of the cosmos, including 'Third World' countries, zero-contract workers, stressed-out managers, and the biosphere, pays the bills. And even as anti-social behaviour, dystopia

and internal divisions fracture the nation, we are led to believe that through this system our lives will keep improving. This is because the collective mentality is subject to advertising and media that tell us that happiness comes through consuming more new stuff, or that unhappiness is because of those 'other' people. Media themselves depend on sales, and are subject to the pressures that businesses exert through advertising revenues. They can therefore be steered by lobbying, or by the political views of their owners. Yet through their daily channels, the general public gets its impression of the world and of who is to be praised, blamed, or voted for.

The missing piece in our collective mind-set is objective ethical guidance. The public, swamped by the messages of advertising and media, only gets to vote in terms of the myths and agendas presented by political parties at periodic elections. At such times, the untruths, false promises and propaganda rise to a peak. This is not a scenario for non-partisan discussion of ethical matters, let alone an alignment to the cosmos as a whole.

TRUE RELIGION: NO SUPREMACY

Irrespective of whether its organization is a democracy, monarchy or theocracy, for a harmonious life in the here and now, the human collective has to be aligned to the rest of the cosmos. So the nation-state needs to encompass values. Traditionally these were practised through rites and ceremonies that people could participate in, and through which newcomers could receive initiation. In other words, through a mythic or religious expression – that is, an understanding and respect for the living connections within the entire cosmos. The equation is: the more inclusive the cosmos, the greater its validity.

But as history shows us, beware what happens when religion/myth gets political. Throughout history, States have been led by divinely endorsed kings or emperors whose role was to act as the link to the will of heaven. This was the case with the Pharaohs, the

emperors of China and Japan, the Dalai Lamas of Tibet, the Popes of the Middle Ages, and currently the Ayatollahs of Iran. At least in theory, this model creates a figurehead above the political arena, whose work is to keep the nation in line with its principles. Even American presidents may on occasion claim to receive guidance from above, and in a weak form, it underlies the institution of the British monarchy. However, the general problem with this model is that the ruler is endorsed by heaven; he or she is not *obliged* to act out of compassion and concern. Aśoka was a rarity. The early Caliphs spread Islam by the sword; the medieval popes initiated an assault on the Levant, endorsed the conquest of South America, and encouraged the slaughter of their erstwhile, but now Protestant, brethren; the devout Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb is detested by the descendants of the Hindus and Sikhs upon whom he waged war throughout his life. And so on. Just as absolute power should not be given to humans, it should not be accorded to a divisive divinity. Mutuality, not supremacy, is our saving grace.

A human collective can only sustain vigorous life through diversity, religion, and wise custodianship of the biosphere. The primary duty of its supervisory body therefore has to be to connect the nation to these aspects of the cosmos; to maintain and regenerate its true Dhamma. At least we should be encouraged to investigate: Does this way of life harm or sustain my body? Does it corrupt or improve my mind? Does it damage or encourage skilful coexistence with other people, and with the biosphere in general? These are religious questions that a nation needs to ask itself; an effective state should listen, consider, and come up with management that responds to the answers.

Some awakening is due, and is happening, urged by the sheer costs of pollution to the economy, and by the loss of land to rising sea-levels. The increased connections between modern states have supported transnational initiatives, such as the 'ALBA-TCP's recognition of nature's rights, signed by Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela in 2010, and the lobbying by the Pacific

island nations that pushed the 2015 UN Climate Change Agreement in Paris. Added to this, individual nations are establishing codes and legal agreements: Sweden already has its environmental code (established in 1998); the 2008 national constitution of Bhutan pledges governmental protection and improvement of its environment and holds all Bhutanese responsible to do the same; and in 2010, Bolivia implemented a draft 'Law of Mother Earth' that encodes rights for nature [see Panel 3.2].

Admittedly, none of these are major players in the industrial global economy, or backed by military might, but a shift in the relationship to the land and its creatures is a revolution in consciousness. And, because consciousness is organic and bypasses the State, such changes have a way of spreading. As environmental lawyer Polly Higgins writes:

Shifts in consciousness are rarely gradual. Evidence demonstrates that when pressure mounts to a certain point, human evolution experiences a jump in depth of understanding. At that juncture a shift takes place, a shift predicated on the recognition of intrinsic value ... We are waking up to the realization that we are about to make a similar shift. We now know that we can end our damage and destruction of the Earth. All we need do is change the laws to shift our current premise to one where caring for the earth comes first.⁶



Grass Roots and New Roots

TRUE TRANSFORMATION WILL COME FROM THE GRASSROOTS, FROM THE BOTTOM UP, FROM THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES. WHEN THE ENVIRONMENTAL OR GREEN MOVEMENT PINS ITS HOPES ON CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND ACTION, THEY ARE PINNING IT ON SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE ACHIEVED. WHENEVER ANY GREAT TRANSFORMATION HAS HAPPENED, IT IS NOT FROM GOVERNMENT BUT FROM THE BOTTOM UP. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE USA HAPPENED WHEN PEOPLE AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL ROSE AND DEMANDED CHANGE. THE ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA WAS A PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT THAT PUT PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT AND BROUGHT ABOUT CHANGE. IN EASTERN EUROPE AND RUSSIA, TRANSFORMATION CAME ABOUT BECAUSE THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT THERE WAS VERY STRONG. THERE ARE MANY SUCH EXAMPLES. THE GREEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT HAS TO GO TO THE PEOPLE. THE MOVEMENT CANNOT SIMPLY BE BASED ON WORDS, EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE, FACTS AND FIGURES, ARGUMENTS, LOGIC AND SCIENCE. ALL THOSE ARE HELPFUL, BUT THEY ARE NOT ENOUGH. IT HAS TO COME FROM THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE PEOPLE: IT HAS TO BE A KIND OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING.⁷

SATISH KUMAR

THE BUDDHIST TRANSMISSION

Although the Dhamma, as Cosmic Order, is of timeless significance, its words and images arise within the cosmos. They are therefore subject

to the influence of individual minds, of collective mentality (view and belief), of the human body and its material environment. Over the millennia, this material environment has become progressively more urbanized, until in today's world, city-dwellers alone represent 50% of the global population. And with the advent of the Internet, location on the material plane has lessened altogether. The collective mentality has also changed, broadly speaking, from animism to theism to mechanism; telecommunications have disseminated a global culture that threatens local identities. For its part, the nervous system of the human body is now adapted to handling the massive input of a machine-and-systems-driven environment. But even in the first thousand years after the Aśokan age, the cosmos was shifting, and Buddhism morphed within it.

As it spread throughout eastern Asia, Buddhism shaped and was shaped by the various political and cultural bodies that it encountered. The south-east transmission from India flowed across the sea to what is now Sri Lanka, or to the coastal territories of what is now Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, and on into Cambodia and Vietnam. The northern transmission was via the Silk Road through Afghanistan and Pakistan through the Hindu Kush and around the southern or northern rim of the Taklamakan Desert into China. Tibet received Buddhism rather later, through Central Asia and northern India.

The different cultural, geographical and chronological origins of these transmissions are the source of the distinctions between what are now called Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana 'schools'. Theravada developed out of lineages supported by Aśoka that spread south into Sri Lanka; Mahayana developed out of lineages supported by Emperor Kanishka (around the beginning of the Common Era) and moved through the northern routes; Vajrayana arose in the Pala era (750-1175 CE) and was transmitted into Tibet in the eighth and again in the eleventh century.*

*Until the Indian homelands were devastated by Turkish invaders at the end of the 12th century, Buddhism streamed out in many waves over hundreds of years. In this ongoing stream, all of these schools gained some expression throughout much of East Asia. Indonesia, for example, was Vajrayana for a relatively short time, and Thailand had Mahayana sanghas.

In terms of the Sangha, the transmission has been shaped by the support (or lack of it) of the people and the State. Irrespective of the locale or the school, these developments are so universal that they are mirrored in the forms of other religions. Here I'll call them 'Wilderness', 'Intellectual', 'Humanitarian', and 'Salvation'. Of these, Wilderness/Forest Buddhism adopts a 'back-to-the-roots' policy and endorses living in forests or mountains in a way that is as close as possible to the lifestyle of the Buddha's Sangha. As with the Christian Desert Fathers, Hindu sadhus or Sufi mystics, its followers focus on renunciate practices and stand apart from mainstream society. Meditation and discipline take priority over study. There are extant Wilderness/Forest lineages in Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka and Myanmar; Ch'an in China also follows this theme, and the eremitic calling is part of the Tibetan tradition, for which the hermit Milarepa stands as an exemplar.

Intellectual Buddhism takes the texts as its guide for inquiry and extrapolation of the teachings. But it doesn't stop with realizing nibbāna. Finding the presence of intellectually gifted monks to be potentially useful, in fifth-century India, Kumaragupta I founded and supported the monastic academy of Nalanda – where the curriculum included astronomy, logic, metaphysics and grammar. Four other such centres of learning were subsequently established; well-endowed, they shifted the Sangha's focus from mendicancy and reclusehood.

Humanitarian Buddhism commits to working in the society in terms of education, health, and the needs of the homeless. It takes the compassion of the Buddha as its source; an approach that is analogous to mainstream Christianity. This may also be blended with Salvation Buddhism, whereby trust is placed in the Buddha, or in a future Buddha, or to an eternal Buddha rather than the Dhamma, as that which offers the highest fruit. As Christianity and other theistic

approaches do in their way, the Salvation theme refers to a sublime heaven and merciful Bodhisattvas.

These forms occur in all religions, because they represent the way that people try to form a locus of meaning in the face of the vicissitudes of life. So for king and commoner alike, the Dhamma as Salvation presented an order that they could enter through some kind of practice – prayer, meditation or good deeds. Then their lives could find both orientation and a purpose, one that offered self-respect in this life and offered prospects for a good life in the future. However, the specifics of the order differed. For a king, practising Dhamma from a Humanitarian angle would mean ruling with righteousness and reference to the Sangha. For a merchant, Dhamma-practice would be right livelihood, with requests for protection during perilous journeys and a welcome reception for his goods. For the people of the land, correct observance of Dhamma would be to make offerings to the Sangha and the spirits in order to guarantee rain, good harvests and protection from evil. So the most popular forms of Buddhism would include, or be largely attuned to, Salvation, with the Sangha acting as go-betweens mediating with the forces of nature and supernature.

SANGHA AND SOCIETY: THE ODD COUPLE

The relationship between Sangha and society is both essential and problematic; especially due to the development of the State. Historically, as Buddhism spread, its sanghas became location-based and enjoyed royal patronage. For the biosphere, a territorial Sangha was largely beneficial: the monastery occupied land, but in custodianship rather than for farming, mining or exploitation. A forest monastery in Thailand today is generally not a settlement of huts in the wilderness, but a walled-in reserve that protects the trees and creatures from the farms and villages that surround it. As a result of this, a good part of the forest that remains in Thailand today –

along with deer, forest pigs, gibbons, squirrels and birds – owes its existence to the Sangha. However, from the Sangha's point of view, the big threat in all of this support is that of domestication; once removed from the wilderness and attuned to society, the focus on nibbāna gets blurred. Hence the overall pattern of the relationship is one whereby the Sangha gets drawn into the mainstream through the Humanitarian, Intellectual or Salvation interests, loses touch with mendicancy and recluseship and aspects of Vinaya. Then a reform movement gets going and heads for the wilderness – before it too gets popular. And so on.

Still, as long as its members were governed by the Dhamma-Vinaya, the Sangha could have a positive effect on the nation. Until imperial or colonial disestablishment, education, culture, natural healing and counselling were all potentially part of its humanitarian duty. The monastery could adopt children whose parents were unable to support them, and across the region, people would enter the Order and yet maintain a connection to their home village. This was the case in Thailand until the secularization of the late twentieth century, where most males would spend a part of their lives in the Sangha and were only regarded as mature if they had done so.* In this way, there was a widespread dissemination of values such as generosity, respect, patience and morality, from childhood onwards. In rural areas of Thailand, this relationship still works in terms of village life.

However, whenever the overarching principles and aims of Dhamma-Vinaya got buried beneath secular concerns, sanghas were drawn into politics and business, and the Dhamma declined in favour of performing blessings. And if the Dhamma isn't aligned to the wilderness and its creatures, the environment suffers. The land that the village was embedded in was increasingly cultivated, so the

*The lack of bhikkhunis in the Theravada countries is on account of history (the Sangha was eliminated in Sri Lanka by famine and conquest, and bhikkhunis not sent from Burma to regenerate it), Vinaya disputes over re-creating this Order, and cultural conservatism.

average Southeast Asian villager regarded the forest not as part of the cosmos, but as a jungle full of menacing animals, spirits and diseases – he or she was happy to see it cleared. Furthermore, as the

III.4

Jose Mujica, President of Uruguay 2010-15

After spending thirteen years in prison for his part in resisting the military dictatorship, Mujica was released and eventually took office as Minister of Agriculture in the new government. Subsequently, he was elected as president of Uruguay. Shunning a luxurious lifestyle, he lived on a small farm owned by his wife on the outskirts of Montevideo and drove his own 1987 VW Beetle. His security force amounted to two policemen and a three-legged dog.

By donating 90% of his salary to charity, his income was approximately the average in Uruguay – \$775 (£485) a month.

After completing his term of office, the president left Uruguay in a condition of economic health. His government ended the long-running dispute with Argentina concerning the Uruguay River and signed an agreement detailing an environmental monitoring plan of the river and the setting up of a bi-national commission. While neighbouring Argentina and Brazil have suffered economic downturns in recent years, Uruguay experienced rising salaries and a historically low unemployment rate.

•••

(From the movie 'Human')

'Either you're happy with very little, without overburdening yourself, because you have happiness inside, or you'll get nowhere. I

am not advocating poverty. I'm advocating sobriety. But we've invented a consumer society ... which is continually seeking growth ... We invented a mountain of superfluous needs. You have to keep buying, throwing away ... It's our lives we are squandering. When I buy something, or when you buy it, we're not paying with money. We're paying with the time from our lives we had to spend to earn that money. The difference is that you can't buy life. Life just goes by. And it's a terrible way to waste your life losing your freedom.'

'It is a mistake to think that power comes from above, when it comes from within the hearts of the masses (...) it has taken me a lifetime to learn this.'

'I have a way of life that I don't change just because I am a president. I earn more than I need, even if it's not enough for others. For me, it is no sacrifice, it's a duty.'

'I'm called "the poorest president", but I don't feel poor. Poor people are those who only work to try to keep an expensive lifestyle, and always want more and more.'

'As soon as politicians start climbing up the ladder, they suddenly become kings. I don't know how it works, but what I do know is that republics came to the world to make sure that no one is more than anyone else. You don't need a palace, red carpet, a lot of people behind you saying "Yes, sir." I think all of that is awful.'

population increased, so did the pressure on the land, and with the growth of the global economy, and trade in tropical hardwood, the wild places disappeared.

In political terms, one of the drawbacks of the Aśokan model is that what was originally a system of Emperor and Sangha mutually supporting each other in accord with Dhamma could degenerate into the State using territory-based sanghas, with their influence on local people, as a moral rubber stamp for its policies. The Pala kings established a 'patron-priest' relationship whereby monasteries would govern a region on behalf of the king in return for his support; this became the model for Tibetan monasticism. Territorial sanghas were also liable to politicization on their own count, becoming rivals for royal favour and sponsorship. In this Sangha-State relationship, Buddhism has developed over more than two thousand years in a zigzag of popular endorsement, suppression and revival. In China and Korea, its sanghas were successively bonded to the state, ushered into the court, defrocked and driven into the mountains, and then allowed back on government terms. This precarious status quo led to corruptions and changes – and for some an increased resilience and need to adapt. The prohibition against using money or growing food fell away. Vegetables were grown in the monastery to supplement the donations of rice; while those seeking greater solitude moved deeper into the mountains to live an austere life free from social pressures.

When Buddhism was first introduced to China, it was held to be a form of Daoism, adding ethics to the pre-existing animist mysticism. So some emperors supported it as a moral bastion for their imperium, while others feared it as the basis for an alternative state. This was not an ungrounded concern; in neighbouring Tibet, the kings of the eighth and eleventh centuries had eagerly promoted Buddhist teachers and teachings and the monastic orders gained State support. Maybe that affected their focus: when the penultimate king was assassinated, his usurper was murdered by a monk. The

monastic lineages, although rivalling each other, became the most stable collective in the region, and by the seventeenth century, a Gelugpa-Mongol alliance presided over a sizeable area of Central Asia. This imperial theocracy was regarded as a threat by the Qing emperors, and they steadily undermined and attacked it until, as internal strife shattered the Tibet-Mongol hegemony, they were able to gain influence. Monastic feudalism continued to support a factionalism that even its leaders couldn't check, so the resultant state was inadequate to deal with the Chinese invasion of 1949. From the invaders' point of view, the suppression of the Sangha was justified as a necessity in order to free the people from monastic domination.

Like most pre-industrial states, the average Southeast Asian state wasn't a centralized entity, but a collection of principalities and tribal areas that, while acknowledging the suzerainty of the king, governed themselves and had distinctive local customs, languages and shifting boundaries. The Sangha was similarly diverse. However, foreign invasion, or its threat, forced a unified front, with the Sangha as its spiritual denominator. So wherever there was local resistance, Buddhism and the Sangha were held up as the underpinnings of the national identity; and whenever a foreign power took over, the Sangha was disestablished. For example, in Sri Lanka, the British administration appropriated the land, removed the Sangha from its guiding role, established a centralized and non-native structure and replaced Buddhism with a Western-based Christian education.

Thailand, alone throughout Southeast Asia, avoided colonization, maintained an unbroken connection to its traditions, and adapted itself into a centralized nation-state. Buddhism was consequently configured as one of its three pillars (King, Country and Religion) that unified and strengthened the State. For their part, the kings of Thailand adopted a stance close to that of Aśoka, one that gave broad support to all religions.

BUDDHISM AS A NATIONAL MODEL

In the colonial and post-colonial periods, Asian states were looking to establish their distinctive identities in a world that was dominated by the Western world-view of science, technology and central government. Therefore, Buddhist revival movements, while looking to their indigenous culture for national myth, had to adjust the locus of meaning to match the contemporary world. Consequently, when Buddhism became the rallying point, its most famous spokesman, the Sri Lankan Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864-1933), ditched aspects of indigenous Buddhism and adopted the terms of the contemporary West to bring the message up to date:

The Message of the Buddha that I have to bring you is free from theology, priestcraft, rituals, ceremonies, dogmas, heavens, hells and other theological shibboleths. The Buddha taught to the civilized Aryans of India 25 centuries ago a scientific religion containing the highest individualistic altruistic ethics, a philosophy of life built on psychological mysticism and a cosmogony which is in harmony with geology, astronomy, radioactivity and relativity.

The Message of the Buddha (1925)⁸

Brought up in a nation that he felt had been devastated by missionaries, Dharmapāla became the Buddhist missionary *par excellence*. In 1891, he founded the Mahabodhi Society – whose principle aim was the return of the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya to Buddhist ownership, in the face of Hindu occupation and opposition. His missionary zeal, many writings and presentation of modern Buddhism provided inspiration in unforeseen ways: in 1956, Dr. Ambedkar, the author of the Constitution of the Republic of India and Minister for Law, converted to Buddhism and encouraged millions of his fellow lower-caste Hindus to do the same.*

*The flag of the Republic of India bears Aśoka's twenty-four-spoked Wheel of Dependent Arising and Ceasing at its centre, flanked by Aśokan lion capitals.

Associating Buddhism with social renewal, Ambedkar framed the Dhamma in modern secular terms rather than in the language of folk-religion with its demons and guardian spirits. While the principles of *sīladhamma* were clearly presented, the thrust is humanist:

... accepting Buddhism does not only mean getting into new religion, it means entering into new form of life where everybody has responsibility to cultivate wisdom, compassion and morality in this life moments, Buddha's Dhamma is here to guide and protect humanity, what we have to do is to strive for creating a moral order.

Thus, the Buddhist revival was largely advocated in humanist terms, with the Dhamma and the Sangha configured as a support for the nation – rather than for the realization of *nibbāna*. National grass roots weren't the same as grass-roots Dhamma.*

Furthermore, involvement in the nationalist revival in Sri Lanka had a politicizing effect on the Sangha, in which some factions rejected the pluralist and secularist intent of the early post-colonial government and entered political life. This political activism came to a tragic climax when, in 1956, a bhikkhu assassinated the Prime Minister, Mr Bandaranaike. A further unfortunate result for the nation was an ethno-centric 'Sinhala Buddhism' that has hindered the integration of Tamils and Muslims. And for the Sangha, the resultant instances of bhikkhus adopting political lifestyles and inciting ethnic hatred have led to its weakening. Small wonder then that talk of the need for the Sangha to be 'socially engaged' doesn't always meet with a favourable response.

Similar developments occurred throughout Buddhist Asia. In Japan and China, the Sangha had been under State supervision for centuries, but in general wherever Buddhism survived, 'State Buddhism' with a national government supervising a centralized Sangha authority became its norm. In the twentieth century, most

*An indication of this role reversal is stated by the scholar-monk Ven. Dr. Walpola Rahula: 'A bhikkhu engaged in social work must necessarily possess nobler virtues and qualities than a bhikkhu living by himself and meditating alone in retirement in the forest ... [as] another burden to the country and the nation.'⁹

schools and masters of Buddhism in Japan endorsed the imperial policy that fostered Japan's invasion of China and the Second World War. Subsequent to the destruction of the monasteries in the 1960s, the government of China has modified its attitude to allow Buddhist activities under its supervision – which in Tibet is intense.

In general then, the lesson is that a Buddhist State is bad for the nation, the State and the Sangha.

BUDDHIST HUMANISM

As the East established its independence in the twentieth century, inspiration also flowed along a humanist channel. Attracted to Mahatma Gandhi's 'Sarvodaya' (= 'welfare of all') grass-roots philosophy, A.T. Ariyaratane began the Sarvodaya Shramanadāna ('gift of labour') movement in Sri Lanka in 1958. Sarvodaya's first scheme was the Hundred Villages Development Scheme (1968); by 1981 that had grown to include over 4,000 villages. Sarvodaya is pluralistic and universal in terms of Dhamma and operates independently of the State. It has structured itself in terms of hundreds of local village councils rather than centralized control, and has branched out to include a research institute, community shops, welfare for abandoned children and discussion groups. These are seen as means of addressing ten basic needs: water; food; housing; clothing; health care; communication; fuel; education; a clean, beautiful environment; and spiritual and cultural life. Critical of the Sangha's disengaged stance, Sarvodaya had by the 1990s recruited over 800,000 volunteers – mostly lay people. To quote Ariyaratane:

While originally inspired by the Buddhist tradition, [Sarvodaya] is active throughout our multi-ethnic society, working with Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities and involving tens of thousands of Hindu, Muslim and Christian co-workers. Our message of awakening cannot be labelled as the teaching of one particular creed.¹⁰

In the period after the Second World War, as the effects of rapid development came to the fore, bhikkhus in Thailand were thinking along the same lines. Here the need wasn't for a cultural revival or a national identity, but an actualization of Buddhist *śīladhamma* to meet changing circumstances. The kings had created a centralized state – and that offered a centralized economy, one that was linked to the global economy and driven by the logic of exploitation. By the 1980s, Thailand had lost 80% of its original forest – either to urban development, logging or cash-crop farming: tapioca and eucalyptus replaced the native hardwoods. But as the consequent degradation of the environment (both in its biological and its human sense) started becoming apparent, it prompted the Sangha to use its role to educate people in ecological terms.

The Sangha's response was often in ways that were tangential to, or even critical of, the status quo. In this respect, the spokesperson was Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993), a blend of forest-dweller, intellectual and humanist.* Eschewing ritualism and advocating inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, Ajahn Buddhadāsa prepared the philosophical ground for a revived relationship with nature in terms of both how the bhikkhus should live and *nibbāna* itself.

The monks must have a discipline or system of living that is most intimate with nature. This means being comrades with nature, to sit and talk, sit and watch, sit and listen, together with nature ... Here we are nature monks, in harmony with nature ... studying nature, until realizing *nibbāna*, which is the pinnacle of nature.

Meanwhile, other monks became more directly engaged. In 1983, Ajahn Pongsak founded Dhammanaat Foundation for Conservation and Rural Development in northern Thailand, in order to support ecological education and community action in the Mae Soi Valley. Here the problem was the slash-and-burn practices of the Hmong hill

*Among Ajahn Buddhadāsa's many writings are books such as *Dhammic Socialism*, and *Christianity and Buddhism, A Comparative Study*.

people who cultivated opium on the higher land and, by removing trees, caused the topsoil to wash away. The government policy of encouraging cultivation of cabbages and potatoes to replace the opium actually worsened the biological aspect of the problem, as along with these vegetables came pesticides banned in Europe. Another benevolent gesture, led by the World Bank, was to level areas of hilly land for cultivation, but that also devastated the soil. Understandably perhaps, Ajahn Pongsak has been sceptical of government support, and saw that such support could, through disempowering it, weaken the collective sense:

... our villagers have no initiative in self-help, in cooperating physically as a group for the sake of the common good or for their own communities ... and a factor is ... the government financial subsidies.¹¹

From 1988 onwards, other Thai monks have started to take an active role in protecting the environment.* These 'ecology monks' have adapted traditional rituals and ceremonies to focus on environmental problems and the value of nature, and inspire people to take part in conservation efforts. Some of these ceremonies are aligned to the nature-mysticism of Salvation Buddhism: these include tree consecration rituals, in which trees are blessed and wrapped in saffron robes to signify their sacred status, and therefore be safe from logging. Ecology monks tap into that understanding and align it to Buddhist principles in order to foster a conservation ethic, and have taken stands against deforestation, shrimp-farming, dam and pipeline construction. Although they've been attacked by illegal logging concerns, these monks have initiated the creation of wildlife reserves, and fostered sustainable community development through the cultivation of cash-crops. Phrakhru Pitak, one of the most active ecology monks, has formed an umbrella non-governmental

*The first recorded instance was in Phayao province (North) in 1988. Often these ceremonies are referred to as 'tree-ordinations', although this is impossible in Vinaya. Yet the popularizing effect of these ceremonies is indicated by the fact that, in 1996-7 a coalition of NGO and government organizations initiated a program of 'ordaining' 50 million trees.¹¹

organization called Hag Muang Nan Group (Love Nan Group) to coordinate the environmental activities of local village groups, government agencies, and other NGOs in his home province of Nan. In Cambodia, Mlup Baitong, a non-governmental organization, is involved with conserving natural resources and fostering sustainable development. Mlup Baitong promotes environmental awareness and community-based natural resource management through education. The organization has established a network of several hundred monks and fifteen temples in the Cambodian provinces of Kompong Speu and Kompong Thom, providing monks with training in Buddhism and ecology, and thereby supporting conservation and sustainability initiatives at the grass-roots level.

Another development has been due to Thai wilderness/forest monks. Formerly regarded as vagabonds, they acquired a growing reputation for accessible wisdom as they settled into monasteries in the 1950s and 60s. They eventually drew the attention and support of the Royal Family.*

Masters such as Ajahn Lee, Ajahn Maha Bua and Ajahn Chah were able to exemplify Vinaya standards to local villagers, and to teach meditation. So they presented models of restraint, and of traditional values to counteract the growth of consumerism in Thailand. Their teachings were earthy, and although often in local dialect, the meaning was accessible; even to the Westerners who came their way from the 1960s onwards.

As Asian life has increasingly meant life in a rapidly growing and polluted city, forest monasteries and their teachers also became reconfigured as resources, with city dwellers making their way there by the coachload. This brought many people into touch with Buddhist teachings and practices that had got buried under social customs; and it also brought people back in touch with the remnants of the forest. Interest in conservation developed accordingly.

*H.M. the late King Bhumipol took a personal interest in conservation projects. His work has included experiments on 'green' technologies and renewable energy sources such as solar power, wind power, hydro and biomass. In the 1980s, he developed a blend of gasoline and alcohol which reduced the amount of carbon emissions and was eventually marketed in 2001.

GLOBAL DHAMMA

To return to Aśoka: *‘Happiness in this world and the next is difficult to obtain without much love for the Dhamma, much self-examination, much respect, much fear (of evil), and much enthusiasm.’* Well-being in this world requires vigour and skill, a skill that will lead to final liberation. So as we proceed through the twenty-first century, an examination of the structures of our society is up for review. We’ve been through a century of global warfare, and we’ve formed agreements and institutions to prevent such disasters arising again; and yet the warfare continues all over the world. And even where war isn’t apparent, terrorist attacks and bomb outrages bring brutal violence to the streets, airports and meeting places of the general public. The mechanisms of the State seem inadequate.

In terms of political structures, faith in democracy is declining as people in democratic societies sense that their concerns and welfare are taking second place to market forces. To an increasing extent, states are tethered to the global economy, and that is steered by multinational corporations, institutions and agreements that govern that economy.

For this reason, the validity of bodies such as the UN, the World Bank, the European Union and even the nation-state are now being questioned. When most of the wealth and the population is in multi-cultural cities, that forms a collective of sorts – so who needs a country? But there’s also the sense that there is a ‘global elite’ whose means and policies are inaccessible to the public domain. The media are held suspect by their connections to government and big business. And as a reaction to that, grass-roots movements are developing their own alternative networks through the Internet and mobile telecommunications. One consequence is an increase in populist uprisings of far-right neo-fascists on one hand, and on the other, street movements such as Occupy in the US, *Nuit debout* in France and the 15-M or *Indignados* in Spain. Their common interest is the end of the neo-liberal State, or in generating alternatives to it.

So the old centre is losing consensus. Collective humanity needs to find a relevant locus of meaning, and to generate local communities at the grass-roots level that can interact with any overseeing management bodies. This brings another challenge: although a collective sense is brought alive by the vigour of its grass roots, without wise and non-partisan guidance, those roots can sprout populist nationalism and ethnic conflict. So responsibility has to be given to the spiritual body of the nation to bring forth the sense people have for empathy and inclusivity. Maybe the transnational environmental crisis can be a spur to that. Protecting the biosphere offers earth-based values that return us to common ground. But the rallying of ideas and opinions also needs to be tempered with direct and steady awareness. Herein is the relevance of meditation: formerly the speciality of *samaṇas* dwelling in solitude, it is now commonly practised by lay people in groups and centres dedicated to the cultivation of calm, understanding and compassion. Touching the Earth begins with resetting our individual locus of meaning in our shared embodiment in the here and now. This is the very *mudra* of the Buddha's awakening: grounded values return our roots to common ground.

Of all values, those that include the entire cosmos in terms of mutual respect, sharing and non-violence are of supreme importance. To this end Buddhism has the advantage that its practices transcend any state. In essence, they are neither political nor territorial and can address a malaise that has become universal. And since the middle of the twentieth century, Buddhism has spread globally. The growth of meditation in the West was due to imports of Buddhist practice from Asia; and that was bound up with its forced exodus from or reinvigoration in its homelands.

When H.H. the Dalai Lama and other eminent Tibetan monks fled their native land, they found a welcome in India and the West. The increasing secularization of Japan and Korea has inspired the migration of lineages (notably Zen) to Europe and America. The

conflict in Vietnam caused Thich Nhat Hanh to relocate in France – and become a spokesperson for Engaged Buddhism. As a result of this monastic diaspora, all of these teachers came to have far greater global influence than had they remained in their native countries. As expatriates, sanghas have tempered their localism, pruned some of the rituals and adjusted their approach to suit their new homes: outside of national location, there's no conquest and no territory (other than the marketplace) to dispute over.

The push from the East has met the pull from a dislocated West, and connected the cultures – without establishing a centralized empire. Secularized '*vipassanā*' meditation and mindfulness practices step outside of Asian culture and are readily accessible. Appealing to city dwellers, intellectuals and progressives, the roots of Dhamma dig through the concrete of our systems, and its branches poke up as mindfulness programs in health care, business, schools – and even political circles. Through meditation groups and lay and monastic sanghas, it also builds communities. If the Buddha's Dhamma can manage to blend a humanist and ecologically-attuned approach with traditional principles and cooperative action, it can help towards generating a global collective.



Walking in the Sense-Fields

Take some time to be with other life forms, animals and plants, in their natural domain, in a receptive way. The best way to do this is by taking a walk – ideally in a wood, park or beside open water, but even a garden will do. Aim for the less well-tended areas.

Walk for a few minutes, five or less, then stop. Stand for a while, letting your breathing deepen and slow down. Close your eyes for ten breaths and listen. Open your receptive faculty. Then become more fully aware of your body, relaxing the shoulders, the hands and the face. Soften around the knees a little and break out of your workaday pace. Then walk again, feeling the feet, and the movement of the muscles in the body. Find the still, upright axis within at the centre of that movement: it sustains the sense of balance that allows the weight of the body to be supported by first one leg and then the other. Keep the eyes in a soft and wide focus, so that rather than giving attention to any particular object, stay aware in the broad field of input that includes the bodily and auditory senses. Walk at a pace that can sustain a focus that includes your body and the space around it.

Tune in to what you can sense in your body and the quality of hearing; there will be particular sensations, energies and sounds. Incline towards the consciousness of these phenomena, that is awareness of bodily feeling and of hearing, rather than the phenomena themselves. Let sights, sounds and moods arise and pass through that awareness. Simply greet what arises without reacting to it or

expecting something out of it. Be with this open awareness until your mind shifts from having a fixed direction to being receptive.

Contemplate what gives rise to the experience of movement: a blend of bodily sensations and energies with changes in the visual field. Be aware of the movement as a co-dependently arising impression that in itself is going nowhere. Contemplate the sense of solidity: a series of sensations and energies also co-dependently arising. Contemplate the world as the co-arising of impressions such as these, along with sounds and occasionally smells, and the mental responses and naming of this.

Notice that although they co-dependently arise, each sense-field is completely different from the others: seeing is nothing like hearing or touching and so on. Recognize the awareness that notices and includes them all. Notice that the mental movement towards thinking doesn't simply include the senses; it creates ideas and opinions and plays with them. Notice how that way of thinking affects your field of awareness – your gaze will narrow, and there will be a loss of bodily and auditory awareness. When thinking forms inner monologues, your walking will become automatic and faster; receptivity dwindles. As you notice this – pause – and return awareness to your body, widening and softening through the walking or the breathing.

If this is difficult, look around and take in the scene, then close your eyes and slowly turn your body. When you've returned to the broad field of receptivity, try to include the thought process as just another phenomenon like sights and sounds. The easiest way to do this is to focus on the energy, the movement of thought and emotion, taking care not to get snagged on their topics.

Spend time in the tactile and auditory sense base one at a time: sensing warmth, dampness, movement of air, and also the sense of

smell. Taste won't be a topic. Leave the sense of sight to the last (as it often dominates the others).

Return to the wider, overall awareness and be fully with the pull of any sense: the sudden pull of attention, the narrowing of focus, and any impressions that touch, sound and sight bring up. Feel the effects on your awareness; attune to both specific and overall effects in terms of mood or inner space. In this way, by connecting each specific impression to the overall awareness, nothing is cut off or grasped; everything contributes to the wholeness. This has a calming and regenerative effect on your entire nervous system.

•••

Whenever liking or disliking occurs, notice how your awareness contracts and forms a felt impression of what you like or dislike. Where is that impression? It's not in the object, but arises co-dependently. Can you note that and relax the contraction to return to open, inclusive awareness? When there is no snagging between the witnessing and that which is witnessed, there is an opening to peace, a wider awareness that has no object. This is Dhamma-Nature. Let yourself rest in that for a while.

When it's time to act, walk, move or even decide, notice the effect. When the decision to act is engaged with, notice how your awareness firms up and makes a distinction between 'me' and 'the world'. Can that action, your potential, be marked with qualities that acknowledge the mutuality of existence, such as goodwill or respect? Can you regard your ability to act as a gift, a mode of awareness rather than an absolute right or identity? Consider what the ability to act depends upon: breath drawn from the shared field. What actions, even thoughts, would duly acknowledge that gift? How can you participate in the gift of life?



Part IV

The Sacredness of Nature

THERE IS NO WAY TO BRING SUFFERING TO AN END WITHOUT REACHING THE END OF THE COSMOS. YET I STATE THAT IT IS JUST WITHIN THIS FATHOM-LONG BODY, WITH ITS PERCEPTION AND COGNITION, THAT THERE IS THE COSMOS, THE ARISING OF THE COSMOS, THE CEASING OF THE COSMOS, AND THE PATH OF PRACTICE LEADING TO THE CEASING OF THE COSMOS.

(A.4: 45)

OUR BODIES ARE WILD. THE INVOLUNTARY QUICK TURN OF THE HEAD AT A SHOUT, THE VERTIGO AT LOOKING OFF A PRECIPICE, THE HEART-IN-THE-THROAT IN A MOMENT OF DANGER, THE CATCH OF THE BREATH, THE QUIET MOMENTS AND RELAXING, STARING, REFLECTING – ALL UNIVERSAL RESPONSES OF THE MAMMAL BODY ... THE BODY DOES NOT REQUIRE THE INTERCESSION OF SOME CONSCIOUS INTELLECT TO MAKE IT BREATHE, TO KEEP THE HEART BEATING. IT IS TO A GREAT EXTENT SELF-REGULATING, IT IS A LIFE OF ITS OWN. SENSATION AND PERCEPTION DO NOT EXACTLY COME FROM OUTSIDE, AND THE UNREMITTING THOUGHT AND IMAGE-FLOW ARE NOT EXACTLY INSIDE. THE WORLD IS OUR CONSCIOUSNESS, AND IT SURROUNDS US.¹

GARY SNYDER, POET, ZEN PRACTITIONER, ECOLOGIST.





Nature, Supernature and Culture

STRUNG WITH GARLANDS OF FLOWERING VINES,
THIS PATCH OF EARTH DELIGHTS THE MIND;
THE LOVELY CALLS OF ELEPHANTS SOUND –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

THE SHIMMERING HUE OF DARKENING CLOUDS,
COOL WATERS IN PURE STREAMS FLOWING;
ENVELOPED BY INDRA'S LADYBUGS –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

LIKE THE LOFTY PEAKS OF LOOMING CLOUDS,
LIKE THE MOST REFINED OF PALACES;
THE LOVELY CALLS OF TUSKERS SOUND –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

THE LOVELY GROUND IS RAINED UPON,
THE HILLS ARE FULL OF HOLY SEERS;
RESOUNDING WITH THE CRY OF PEACOCKS –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

BEING CLOTHED IN FLAXEN FLOWERS,
AS THE SKY IS COVERED IN CLOUDS;
STREWN WITH FLOCKS OF VARIOUS BIRDS –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

NOT OCCUPIED BY VILLAGE FOLK,
BUT VISITED BY HERDS OF DEER;
STREWN WITH FLOCKS OF VARIOUS BIRDS –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

WITH CLEAR WATERS AND BROAD BOULDERS,
HOLDING TROOPS OF MONKEY AND DEER;
COVERED WITH MOIST CARPETS OF MOSS –
THESE ROCKY CRAGS DO PLEASE ME SO!

[BUT] THERE IS NOT SO MUCH CONTENTMENT
FOR ME IN THE FIVE-FOLD MUSIC,
AS IN TRULY SEEING DHAMMA
WITH A WELL-CONCENTRATED MIND.

THE RAGĀTHĀ V.1062-1065 & 1068-1071,

TRANS. A. OLENDZKI¹²

THE SAGE IN THE WILDERNESS

These words are attributed to the arahant (= enlightened one) Maha Kassapa and included in *Theragāthā*, a compilation of verses (*gāthā*) from enlightened bhikkhus who lived in India at the time of the Buddha in the fifth century BCE. Although at first glance Maha Kassapa's words might be attributed to a Romantic poet, he was anything but. In the accounts we have of him, he appears as rugged, stern and austere. In this very *Theragāthā* poem, he recounts receiving alms-food from a leper, whose finger fell from his rotting hand on placing a morsel in the bowl; Maha Kassapa comments that even as he ate the offering, he felt no disgust. This is more sobering than lyrical.

Taken as a whole, the poem presents the rigour and renunciation that one might expect from a rag-wearing recluse, along with the celebration of a landscape untainted by human habitation. And that this jubilation is only surpassed by the happiness of a well-concentrated mind. The overall effect of the verses is to equate renunciation of social norms and the celebration of nature with the mind-set of awakening. In that, Maha Kassapa was not alone: in the same collection, Ven. Sāriputta, the Buddha's chief disciple, affirms '*Forests are delightful, where (ordinary) people find no delight. Those rid of desire will delight there; they are not seekers after sensual pleasures*' (*Theragāthā* v.992). These lines are repeated in a renowned collection attributed to the Buddha himself, the *Dhammapada* (v.99). So Maha Kassapa's is a sentiment echoed by other arahants and the Buddha himself, who is frequently presented as favouring remote groves and forest dwellings.

In summary, the core meaning is that when the awakened mind reviews the manifest world, it exhibits a deep appreciation of 'uncivilized' nature. On the face of it, this is simply because a remote environment offers fewer possibilities for worldly motivation, and also encourages deep contemplation on the facts of existence. In the presence of constant change and the imminence of death, the

mind tunes in with immediacy, focused attention and dispassion. And as they mature, contemplatives continue to deepen by living in harmony with natural processes; they foster an awareness that isn't fettered by egocentric views and inclines towards Dhamma. Once freed of ignorance, the mind is of unfettered vitality – and yet in terms of behaviour, it lives in the light of dependence.

Just as a *samaṇa* lives dependent on this focused awareness and on the free-will generosity of householders, so, in the wilderness, creatures, plants and hermits all live freely supported by an environment that enfolds them. Just as a *samaṇa*'s alms-faring in the village is likened to a bee collecting nectar from a flower without harming it, in the holistic realm of the wilderness, no creature is dominant or exploitative.

This is the gist of Maha Kassapa's celebration. Consequently, 'Nature' – with a capital 'n', the interdependent order of the natural world – and Dhamma – the dependently arising nature of human experience – came to be held as metaphors of each other. As a locus of meaning, the material, the immaterial and the beyond were interconnected.

When the locus of meaning becomes that of interconnectedness, on any level of experience, it is void of attachment to a specific place. So, as far as the material dimension goes, the early texts present the relationship between humans and nature as one of respectful co-existence but no permanent abiding. And for liberation, they make it clear that the mind has to use that relationship to clear the way to the Deathless. This is through purifying the mind and severing the links of the dependent arising of craving and suffering.

A realization of the shared nature of sentient existence releases the mind from egocentricity in terms of view and generates gratitude. Right action follows on from that. Subsequently, the skills of clarity, dispassion and absorption can bring around the ceasing of craving and clinging. This ceasing releases the mind from locating itself in the world of sense-data; and that means freedom from pain, loss and

insecurity. So it's a pity that 'ceasing' doesn't sound like an attractive or accessible realization for most people. What is more inspiring is the notion of interdependence, that of there being a mystical unity of humans and nature. Agreeable, at least as an ideal, this view of Dhamma (or *Dharma*) was adopted in a range of cultures and religions.

NATURE AND AWAKENING – INDIA AND BEYOND

It comes across for instance in the two great Indian epics, *Ramayāna* and *Mahabharata*, wherein nature is acknowledged to be a reliable ground for maturation. Exiled from society through trickery, Prince Rama in one epic, and the five Pandava brothers in the other, are initiated into true *Dharma* through spending years dwelling in the wilderness. The result is that their regal and heroic potential is matured to selfless responsibility through living in harmony with such an environment. In the case of Rama, his return to the human world as righteous king comes around through overcoming Ravana the demon-king – with the active support of powerful animals. For their part, the Pandavas' thirteen years of living in the wilderness bring them into alignment with the will of the gods. Consequently, they go on to recapture their lost kingdom. Overall then, in the ongoing development of Indian culture, nature is presented as a guide to bringing purity and true order into the world of human affairs – whether this be as a recluse, or as a Righteous Monarch. The ideal of course can't touch the ground for long before a dilemma leaps up: how is clearing forest, cultivating land, keeping herds of tasty cattle, and breeding more and more humans going to co-exist in a land of elephants, deer and tigers?

Nevertheless, this ideal is not confined to India: the motif of the wilderness as a place of realignment to transcendent truth is also embedded in Judao-Christian culture – Moses receives Commandments on a mountain, not in the temple or library; Jesus has his divinity and mission confirmed in the wilderness, and the Desert

Fathers and an entire eremitic tradition followed that example. As in Maha Kassapa's case, being in nature attunes us to the sacred.

Meanwhile, in the more secular domain, the Grail knights of European culture were held to attain their higher training, purification and final realization through faring on in remote forests and desert places – although occasionally hacking a fellow-knight to death as they did so.

Why I write 'more secular' is because in pre-industrial – or pre-humanistic – societies, there was never a complete cut-off between the sacred and the mundane. The truths and sacred laws of the society were the concern of more fully committed aspirants, mystics and priests, but within those guidelines, the lay followers dealt with matters of family and farming and jurisprudence. Religion, the 'binding', bridged the gap; its priests and sages were expected to resolve the misfit between human needs and the rest of the cosmos through conveying the Will or Law of what oversees the cosmos to folk in the world. Rituals, ceremonies and images – or 'culture' (from the Latin '*cultura*' = 'growing', 'cultivation') – were developed whereby the human world could find a harmonious way to feel an alignment to a vast universe 'out there'. So in a pre-humanistic society, religious teachings are held to bear the message about, or even from, whatever governs the cosmos, while cultural artefacts and behaviour translated that supernatural 'voice' into poems, paintings, ritual, ceremony and social etiquette. The deep truths of the mind or spirit will always be subjective (and perhaps the preserve of a few), so a collective cultural form is needed for communal engagement. Culture then holds sway over society; it provides an underpinning that maintains order in the world.

Interestingly and intuitively enough, most cultures indicated that an 'uncivilized' environment supports development by connecting us to our more authentic and original inner territory. Further, the understanding was that this environment both encourages living

The Bodhisattva Precepts (Extract)

A disciple of the Buddha must not deliberately eat meat. He should not eat the flesh of any sentient being. The meat-eater forfeits the seed of Great Compassion, severs the seed of the Buddha-Nature and causes [animals and transcendental] beings to avoid him. Those who do so are guilty of countless offenses. Therefore, Bodhisattvas should not eat the flesh of any sentient beings whatsoever. If instead, he deliberately eats meat, he commits a secondary offense.

A disciple of the Buddha shall not, out of evil intentions, start wildfires to clear forests and burn vegetation on mountains and plains, during the fourth to the ninth months of the lunar year. Such fires [are particularly injurious to animals during that period and may spread] to people's homes, towns and

villages, temples and monasteries, fields and groves, as well as the [unseen] dwellings and possessions of deities and ghosts. He must not intentionally set fire to any place where there is life. If he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense.

A disciple of the Buddha should have a mind of compassion and cultivate the practice of liberating sentient beings ... If a Bodhisattva sees an animal on the verge of being killed, he must devise a way to rescue and protect it, helping it to escape suffering and death. The disciple should always teach the Bodhisattva precepts to rescue and deliver sentient beings.

Bodhisattva Precepts: from *The Buddha Speaks the Brahma Net Sutra*, trans. Bhikshuni Heng Tao (Talmage, California: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1981).

in harmony and even represents that harmony in a metaphorical and imaginative (or mythic) sense. Nature presents meaning, and places become loci of meaning. Moreover, there is, or was, a broad understanding that in this Nature there is no distinction between what we would call the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'; the cosmos is suffused with supernatural forces. As to the juggling act of how civilized humans are supposed to fit in with all this, and come to terms with death, predation, disease, and natural calamities, a common answer was through sacrifice, ritual and prayer. Sacrifice could mean self-sacrifice, as in fasting or other forms of abstinence, or sacrifice of life itself. Sacrificing an animal (or many) could do a number of things: transfer the animal's spirit to the spiritual domain

of its archetype, or appease the gods, or just demonstrate to the supernatural aspect of the cosmos that you were acknowledging its superiority and requesting its help in maintaining (a human-centred) order. Priests or kings, as initiates and specialists in ritual, were required to lead such sacrifices. Daily prayer and offerings on shrines were the individual's duty in order to keep their corner of the cosmos tidy; but for big jobs, like ensuring that the sun proceeded on its course, some cultures felt that a human sacrifice would work best.

ANIMISM AS THE UNIVERSAL CULTURE

This vision of the cosmos – as responsive to humans, but ordered by powers superior to humans that we had to mediate with – was the common standard. It remains relevant; at least as a way of moderating the superiority complex that our species suffers from – and based on which we claim rights over others. The variable point is the means of mediation – that is, the religious expression and the culture. Of these, the expression of the earliest cultures that we can trace employs images of the local wildlife that the people hunted, mingling with strange humanoid figures, and weaponry. These images were painted on the walls of caves that are so deep and remote that they can have served no other purpose than ritual. We call this religious vision ‘animism’; it is the bedrock of human religious culture.

Animism presents a living and responsive cosmos of undivided natural and supernatural forces, one that has to be mediated by priests, brahmins, witches or shamans. The animist perspective is sustained and participated in to this very day, for example, among the Khoisan people of South Africa or in Haitian Vodou (West African Vodun); it also informs the observances of Daoism and Shinto, and pagan movements in contemporary Europe. And it is the backdrop against which the Buddha taught. Both the suttas and the Vinaya affirm that the cosmos is inhabited by evil spirits, *yakkhas* and *preta*, by supernatural serpents (*naga*) and by deities (*deva*) who dwell in trees

and whose Four Great Kings supervise the forces of nature. Although these beings are regarded as inferior in wisdom and liberation to the Buddha and the awakened disciples (who offer them guidance), as supernatural agencies they are to be treated with respect; apart from any other consideration, they are a hinge-point in the cosmos. They speak (to those who can hear) and can be communicated with; they are the very voice and mind of the living phenomenal world. Offending them causes upheaval in terms of the climate, with disastrous results, as evidenced in the case of the Buddhist Unrighteous Monarch:

When kings are unrighteous ... the sun and moon proceed off course ... the winds blow off course and at random ... the deities are upset, sufficient rain does not fall ... the crops ripen irregularly ... people ... become short-lived, ugly, weak and sickly. (A.4: 70)

The socio-cultural reality for most people is that, whether they go to nibbāna or heaven after death, they are interested in getting help in the mundane affairs of this life. And towards this end, the animist message is that mediating with nature is essential.* When that world-view is established in a culture, it coerces any subsequently introduced religion into accommodating its images and rituals. As with Christianity: Christmas and Easter were both pagan festivals; rituals involving the yew and mistletoe stem from pre-Christian times; and ‘green men’ and a host of goblins carved in stone peer down on the faithful from the lofty walls of the great European cathedrals. In like fashion, the animist world-view was both incorporated and made relevant to the Buddha’s focus on the causes of suffering.**

However, the only sacrifices that the Buddha advocated (see *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, D.5) were those of sacrificing wealth by distributing

*As an indication of how Buddhism and animism have interwoven, the word ‘shaman’ derives from ‘samāṇa’, and one of the roles of a contemporary bhikkhu is of exorcising or placating spirits.

**It is, however, the case that the Buddha’s path to the end of suffering proceeds perfectly well without a supernatural element. The *devas* never provide crucial instruction; rather they seek it, or express approval of it.

it freely, sacrificing power over others for ethical integrity, and sacrificing worldly ambition in favour of cultivating the ending of suffering and stress. Because ‘*Whatever has an origin must come to cessation*’: by fully accepting the transient nature of impulse and gratification, of pleasure and pain, of fame and ignominy and of gain and loss, people become less demanding and exploitative, and grow more contented and open-hearted. And by accepting mortality and transience, humans realize serenity and a ‘Deathless’ awareness. The Buddhist cosmos turns around this axial understanding. It is also ethically attuned: its gods don’t want, in fact disapprove of, bloodshed. Instead they rejoice in human virtue, visit arahants and psychically ‘feed’ on *puñña* - ‘goodness’. In fact, some denizens of the cosmos, such as hungry ghosts and departed relatives, need *puñña* to be made by living humans and shared with them, in order that they may in due course attain a fortunate rebirth.

As Buddhism spread to other countries, it continued to flow through the local version of a cosmos whose spirits might offer protection or cause disaster, and so had to be consulted, placated (by bhikkhus or animist seers) and be offered *puñña* to ensure that a house, a wedding, a birth or a crop would receive benevolent attention. In this way, Buddhism infused the animist world-view with a sensitivity to the lives of fellow sentient beings, and encouraged a commitment to moral precepts and the cultivation of *pāramī*. Even today, people will undertake acts of largesse, or live the renunciant life in a monastery for a few days or weeks in order to, in the Thai expression, ‘*tam bun*’ - cultivate *puñña* - for themselves or on behalf of a departed relative.

BUDDHA-NATURE AND DHAMMA ESSENCES

The development of Buddhism after the beginning of the Common Era was moderated by doctrinal, geographical and cultural divergence. One branch, established in Sri Lanka, formed what is now called

Theravada and was transmitted to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. This branch has preserved a collection of 547 stories of the Buddha's previous lives – the *Jātaka*. This great sequence presents stories in which the future Buddha perfects *pāramī*. Overall, the *Jātaka* message is that it is through righteous actions and self-sacrifice and that mind-stream accumulates the spiritual strength that is a condition for awakening. Their folklore origins are of uncertain antiquity, but as Buddhist fables, they date back to the fourth century BCE, and have been added to and given commentaries throughout the centuries. These stories represent the mainstream of Buddhist culture, one deeply rooted in an awareness of the potency of the natural-supernatural world, but still finding a place in or above it through giving up hoarding, aversion, and fear. As well as craving – even for life itself.

The other branches of Buddhism are Mahayana and Vajrayana, movements that developed the religious link to the supernatural beyond ethics and into the Ideal. By which I mean that Dhamma practices, especially those of devotion and *pāramī* were configured, not just as paths to liberation, but as aspects of a supernatural Ideal reality – a blessed realm of *puñña*.

Mahayana began in India around the first century CE as an exploration of aspects of Dhamma, and, although it was never a unified movement, its schools share several themes. Some of these themes have a bearing on the topic of this essay. One is that of the 'three bodies of Buddha', i.e. that the flesh-and-blood Gotama Buddha was *Nirmānakāya*, a corporeal manifestation of timeless Buddha-essence that possesses both an unfathomable transcendence (*Dharmakāya*) and an image-bearing potency (*Sambhogakāya*) that can bestow blessings in terms of teachings and miracles. In this presentation, as Gotama has now passed away, it is the Ideal timeless Buddha-essences that are of eternal significance.

Added to this was the teaching that all sentient beings have 'Buddha-Nature' – so the potential for awakening extends to the animal realm. Yet another important theme is that of the Bodhisattva who, while carrying the full potential for nirvāna, vows to stay in this world to help all sentient beings towards that realization. As an authorization of the validity of the Ideal, there is the notion of Mind-Only – that all experience is mind-based and form is of an illusory nature. This merging of the Ideal and the mundane allowed considerable flexibility: a Bodhisattva may manifest as a rogue, a goddess or a mangy dog in order to assist a Mahayana aspirant. This naturally affects how one regards an animal, and ceremonies whereby captured animals are set free are a part of Mahayana observance. The Ideal has a pragmatic effect; although somewhat tempered by the capturing of animals by sharp-witted traders in order to sell them to devotees.

Vajrayana took the Mahayana Idealist platform and added elements from two animist transmissions: Indian Tantra and Tibetan *Bön*. 'Animist' here is too simple a term to describe the Vajrayana vision of the cosmos: as a vast dimension of hallucinatory intensity inhabited by benign and wrathful deities who may bring blessings or ruin to the human realm. Many of these spirits are embedded in the land itself. But in line with shamanistic practice, the Vajrayana adept can manage, subdue and even gain alliance with these supernatural beings to use their essence for spiritual purposes. This is not the place to go into details, other than to note that the Vajrayana practitioner, as is the case for all Buddhists, has to firmly abolish all self-seeking and enter a relationship with the earth's natural and supernatural forces that is forged through respect and sustained effort.

When Mahayana entered China it met Daoist culture, of which it was at first regarded as an ethical accessory. Daoism, with its emphasis on longevity, along with its more socially-oriented Confucianism, together met the need for a more harmonious life in this world. So

the Mahayana pantheon of Bodhisattvas could well be seen as the Daoist celestials in Indian attire, and Daoists like Buddhists, valued meditation, the eremitic ideal, and rituals to engage the natural world in healing. Consequently, the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, morphed into Kwan Yin, a Chinese mother goddess. And with the vow to save all sentient beings, Kwan Yin became a prominent figure, perhaps the dominant one for the average person. So saving animals (who might themselves be Bodhisattvas in disguise, or relatives from a previous life) and hence vegetarianism, became standard features of Chinese Mahayana.

Japan subsequently took on the Chinese version of Mahayana and followed suit in many mundane ways. For example, in 676 CE Japanese Emperor Tenmu proclaimed an ordinance prohibiting the eating of fish and shellfish as well as animal flesh and fowl. His successor, the Empress Jito, encouraged the releasing of captive animals; she also established nature reserves, where animals could not be hunted. It's a simple ethical conclusion.

Meanwhile, nature continued to be seen as the ideal environment for awakening. For example, the ninth-century Chinese hermit Han Shan writes:

When hermits hide from society
 most retire to the hills
 where green vines veil the slopes
 and jade streams echo unbroken
 where happiness reigns
 and contentment lasts
 where pure white lotus minds
 are not stained by the muddy world.

(from *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, translated by Red Pine³)

In terms of the natural world, another important development was the mystical depth accorded to the bond between human, natural and supernatural. The pivotal shift occurs in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*

(composed between first and fourth centuries CE), which presents the vision that all aspects of the manifest cosmos are included in all others. According to the sutra, to enter this understanding of ‘Inter-being’ is to enter the body of Mahavairocana Buddha – a shift that is synonymous with awakening. Thus there is no need to realize the cessation of phenomena; rather the aim is to change one’s view – so that phenomena in themselves become sacred manifestations of Buddha-Nature.

This sutra was the root text of the Chinese Hua Yan school (6th CE onwards), that – using the image of a vast net, ‘Indra’s net’, in which every node reflects all the others – taught that all material form is an aspect of an overarching wholeness. Following suit, the Tientai school taught that even the non-sentient world of mountains is a manifestation of Buddha-Nature. Its Japanese form, Tendai, therefore easily embraced elements from the local religion – Shinto (‘spirit Way’) – that considered mountains and trees to be invested with spirit, called ‘*kami*’. Whether one perceived that spirit in terms of plural entities or as forms of natural energy, as with feng shui, or as a Dhamma-essence like *puñña*, was perhaps of lesser importance – especially given the Mahayana take on Inter-being and the illusory nature of form. A point to note here is that through these cultural and geographical shifts, the supernatural aspects of nature of early Buddhism received an upgrade. In this revised version, the natural world is not just a suitably remote abiding place for a contemplative, nor a coach in developing the mind, nor even a metaphor for awakened purity; it is a manifestation of the immaterial essence of the Dhamma.

The most striking crystallization of this understanding occurs in the teachings of Zen master Dogen (1200-1253 CE). In his luminous *Mountains and Waters Sūtra*, Inter-being, a sensitivity to the spirits of the land, and Buddha-nature merge to accord awakening to all phenomena. It begins thus:

Interconnectedness

In the 1990s, the population of sea otters off the southwest coast of Alaska began to drop, and within ten years had decreased by 90%. The reason? From the mid-nineteenth century until 1970, humans had hunted whales intensively. Because of this, the twentieth-century population of whales was a vestige of that of the eighteenth century.

With fewer whales to feed on their chief predator, the orca or 'killer whale' had to seek other sources of food. First it was the sea-lions, and as their population collapsed, the orcas turned to sea otters for sustenance. Obviously the amount of meat and essential fat on one otter is negligible to that provided by one humpback whale. So their numbers plummeted.

The loss of the sea otters had its effects. The otters' favourite food is the sea urchin, and sea urchins like to eat kelp, the trailing seaweed that can reach over thirty metres in length. Kelp forms great underwater forests that moderate the height of the waves that hit the shore; so when the population of sea urchins burgeoned due to the absence of otters, and that kelp was grazed down to shreds – there

was an increase in wave height and damage. Kelp also happens to be the backbone of the marine food chain, supporting over 8,000 vital marine species – who were all negatively affected. For instance, the reduction of kelp reduced the cover for fish, who were subsequently demolished by larger predators. Furthermore, kelp reduces the amount of CO₂ potentially in the atmosphere by ingesting it (a 'carbon lock'). So a reduction in kelp increases the carbon content in the ocean, and that contributes to climate change.

The reduction of the population of whales has another consequence. Whale dung is deposited near the surface of the ocean, and as it cascades down, its iron provides food for the plankton; and they in turn become food for the krill on which many whales feed. Plankton also remove carbon from the atmosphere; when they die, their bodies act as a carbon lock keeping carbon out of the atmosphere for millennia. So less whales = less plankton = more CO₂. Meanwhile, it has been calculated that if just one of the thirteen species of great whale were restored to its pre-whaling levels, the amount of carbon removed would amount to 2.4 million tons.

Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient Buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose they are emancipation realization.

The Zen twist is that of 'phenomenal expression': that phenomena do not represent something; directly seen, they already are an

expression. Words just get in the way of a direct realization of, and participation in, the Dhamma-essence of the cosmos.*

The sutra continues in like manner:

It is not only that there is water in the world, but there is a world in water. It is not just in water. There is also a world of sentient beings in clouds. There is a world of sentient beings in the air. There is a world of sentient beings in fire. There is a world of sentient beings on earth. There is a world of sentient beings in the phenomenal world. There is a world of sentient beings in a blade of grass. There is a world of sentient beings in one staff. Wherever there is a world of sentient beings, there is a world of Buddha ancestors. You should thoroughly examine the meaning of this.⁴

Although Dogen's teachings would have been heard by few, they echo and build upon the Shinto perspective that informed the cultural norm. And, as always, culture directs popular sensitivities and action. So respect for the land and its sacredness is an ongoing feature of Japanese culture, wherein the blossoming of cherry-trees or the deep autumn colouration of the maples inspires crowds to visit gardens and temples. But with the cultural logic of embedding spirits in one's native land, the drawback is that it is *Japanese* trees that are sacred. Thus the locus of meaning gets nationalized. And now, although its regeneration and preservation of its own woodland is impressive, Japan is the world's leading importer of wood and pulp and the second largest importer of tropical hardwood. In 1990, for instance, the Japanese paper company Daishowa disregarded the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation's land rights in Alberta, Canada and began clear-cutting the forests of the Lubicon territory. Entire groves of Australia's rare and magnificent karri tree have been felled to make woodchips for the Japanese market. The Ideal got left in Japan.

*This 'non-conceptual presentation' – that all phenomena are to be directly apprehended rather than conceived of – is a hallmark of Zen (Chinese: Ch'an). This tradition configures Maha Kassapa as its spiritual progenitor with an account of the great recluse giving a direct expression of the Buddha's Dhamma by silently holding up a flower.

A view of the integrated reality of the human, the natural and the supernatural is common to cultures as separate as South Africa and Siberia, New Zealand, North America and Nepal. But a workable integration in terms of the everyday reality of the average human isn't the same as the interpenetrated union of the mystic. This mystic union is common to Christian, Sufi and Hindu mystics, and bears comparison to the suffused unity of *jhāna* in Buddhist *samādhi*. As a vision, it is of the non-sensory order of reality, as with myth. Through this mythic means, 'Indra's Net' conveys an important message: humans are not in a position that is separate from or dominating the rest of the cosmos; we are an integral and responsible part of the web.

Fitting that vision into the sensory-material level of the cosmos, however, takes integrity and effort. Because, on the sensory level, nature and humans are not interdependent. Any interdependence, such as that which is ritually enacted by the Barasana people, occurs on the mythic plane. In material terms, if humans ceased to exist, the rest of the natural world (excepting a few cows, cats and dogs) would get on fine, even celebrate our passing – whereas if the biosphere breaks down, the continued existence of humanity as we know it becomes unlikely. In material terms, the dependence is one-sided, there's nothing 'inter' about it.

So rather than celebrate an overarching wholeness, what is required for integration is to pick up the myth's network image and begin to translate that into meaningful action. Integration is then a matter of translating myth into ethics (and conversely of generating appropriate myths and symbols to enshrine those ethics). This is Dhamma as a practice rather than an essence: it comprises actions and inclinations to be cultivated in line with *pāramī* – in a nutshell, through self-sacrifice. Such as consuming less, limiting population, and giving up supremacy over the cosmos in favour of finding a sustainable balance within it. This is positive integration. And if we

are interconnected with the nuclear bomb and the devastation of the Niger Delta, it's not because of a mystic unity; it's through our domination instincts.

To the Buddha, the arising of conscience and concern, and of the ability to penetrate different levels of reality, was dependent on the subsiding of ignorance. This is *dhammachat*, the birthplace of natural order. But to others, goodness, truth, and vision emanated from a source called 'God'. And the interpretation of *that* word has been a problematic issue.



The West: Holistic Vision versus Scientific Development

THIS WORLD IS INDEED A LIVING BEING SUPPLIED WITH SOUL AND INTELLIGENCE ...

A SINGLE VISIBLE ENTITY, CONTAINING ALL OTHER LIVING ENTITIES.

PLATO: *TIMAEUS*

THE HOLISTIC TRADITION

A few years prior to Dogen's *Mountains and Rivers Sūtra*, another learned attempt to integrate the sacred with the natural world was in the process of being condemned. Presiding over the Church's Council at Sens in 1225 CE, Pope Honorius III declared *De divisione naturae*, the five-volume masterwork by the Irish monk John Scottus Eriugena, to be 'swarming with worms of heretical perversity'. It was a verdict reiterated by Gregory XIII in 1585. Prior to this double condemnation, Eriugena, who had passed away in 877, had been a theologian and scholar of renown and head of the Palatine Academy at Laon in northern France. Eriugena had read Plato, and had also indirectly tapped into the Greek Neoplatonist tradition through translating the texts of the sixth-century Christian Neoplatonist, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

What this line of thought presented was a holistic paradigm wherein the sacred was intimately involved with the world of matter through the medium of underlying 'Ideal' essences that emanated from the Divine. In his *Timaeus*, for instance, Plato (428-348 BCE) argues for the existence of a 'demiurge' who models the created world on the Ideal, the world of unchanging principles. According to this line of reason, matter is a chaotic mass of four elements (earth, air, fire and water – as in Buddhism) and the demiurge gives it both order and intelligence. Plotinus (204-270 CE), the father of Neoplatonism, added to this by teaching that there was an ineffable One, the Good, from which the Divine Mind (the Creator/demiurge) and the Cosmic Soul (both the Ideal forms of the world and matter itself) emanated. Pseudo-Dionysius had studied Neoplatonism and he subsequently translated its framing references into Christian terms: God as Transcendent is an unknowable godhead (cf. Plotinus' 'One') beyond the Created, but the Divine Mind/Creator forms and infuses the Cosmos through an Ideal hierarchy of principles and angels.*

What *De divisione naturae* synthesizes out of all that is a schema wherein 'Nature' is the most fundamental unity, approximating to the Buddhist 'world' or cosmos. Eriugena then categorized Nature as having four aspects: the world of Creation as we ordinarily experience it; God as Creator/Word/Divine Mind; the underlying 'Causes' or formative principles (as with Plato's Ideal) that underlie Creation as 'Effect'; and God as the ground beyond Creation (the godhead, Plotinus' 'One') to which Creation ultimately returns. So Eriugena's ninth-century work drew Christian theology into alignment with the Greek mystical philosophical tradition to explicate the integral relationship between God and his Creation. It presents a holistic vision of harmony: an undivided and soulful universe in which God has two aspects: one

*For the sake of brevity, I haven't included the schemas of the Hermetic and Christian Gnostic traditions. In the multi-threaded Hellenistic world of the first to third centuries CE, they formulated similar presentations of the cosmos.

as inactive, ineffable Ground of Being and the other as Creator who suffuses it with his energies in an ongoing way.

This ‘panentheism’ (‘all in God’) echoes Mahayana’s Buddha-Nature (‘Buddha in all’) – to present a mystic force that suffuses creation. And more than that: in panentheism, the Mahayana theme of the Three Bodies of Buddha – ‘Form body’ (*Nirmānakāya*), ‘Idea body’ (*Sambhogakāya*) as Creator, and ‘Transcendent body’ (*Dharmakāya*) as ineffable Ground – plays out in the terms of a Christian mind-set. So there are striking similarities between the holistic trend in the Classical, Christian and Buddhist traditions. Where the Pali has *bodhipakkhiyā dhammā* and *pāramī*, later Buddhism has Bodhisattvas and deities, and the Western esoteric traditions have Powers, Causes and angels. Historically, it may be due to the interactions along the Silk Road between Rome, Greece, India and China during the first centuries of the Common Era, but in a psycho-spiritual sense, it represents a common desire (and the animist mission) to bring the sacred and the mundane into harmony.

One may very well acknowledge the attractions of this paradigm, its surprising span of religions and cultures and the intellectual efforts that lay behind it – and at the same time ask: ‘How *true* is this?’ There are no records of Gotama Buddha expressing Dhamma in quite this way, and Eriugena’s work twice received the condemnation of the Church. The vision of God held by the Church was of a unity, even though that was yet a Trinity approximating the Three Bodies. The tricky point for theologians was how to reconcile the existence of evil with the notion of an omnipotent Divinity. If God is All, He must be Good and Evil; if he’s only one aspect of that, he’s a partner not the supreme agent, and therefore not omnipotent. The mainstream resolution was that God allowed evil to take place to test human beings, who, if they failed the test, would go to everlasting Hell. God’s Will was inscrutable and not to be inquired into. This model of domination, without responsibility but with punishment, fitted the

Romantic Themes

I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And tolls through all things.

...

Nature never did betray

The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.

William Wordsworth: 'Tintern Abbey'
Lines 94-103 and lines 121-134 (1798)

...

The primary Imagination I hold to be the
living power and prime agent of all human
perception, and as a repetition in the finite
mind of the eternal act of creation in the
infinite I AM.

S.T. Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

...

Consider the great elements of human enjoyment, the attainments and possessions that exalt man's life to its present height, and see what part of these he owes to institutions, to Mechanism of any kind; and what to the instinctive, unbounded force, which Nature herself lent him, and still continues to him. Shall we say, for example, that Science and Art are indebted principally to the founders of Schools and Universities? ... No; Science and Art have, from first to last, been the free gift of Nature; an unsolicited, unexpected gift; often even a fatal one. These things rose up, as it were, by spontaneous growth, in the free soil and sunshine of Nature. They were not planted or grafted, nor even greatly multiplied or improved by the culture or manuring of institutions ... They originated in the Dynamical nature of man, not in his Mechanical nature.

This is not a Religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and Good; but a calculation of the Profitable. Worship, indeed, in any sense, is not recognised among us, or is mechanically explained into Fear of pain, or Hope of pleasure. Our true Deity is Mechanism.

This faith in Mechanism, in the all-importance of physical things, is in every age the common refuge of Weakness and blind Discontent; of all who believe, as many will ever do, that man's true good lies without him, not within.

Thomas Carlyle: *Signs of the Times* (1829)

attitude of the Papacy and all of Medieval Christendom well and has informed much of Western culture.*

Whereas mystics penetrate divinity, theologians study it from the outside; tragically, the ecclesiastical body, with its own political agenda, determined the theological portrait and suppressed that of the mystics. What is increasingly evident, however, is that over the thousand years and more since Eriugena wrote it down, the consequences of repudiating a holistic vision have become evident in the desecration of the cosmos and the destruction of the biosphere.

GOD, DEPENDENT ARISING AND THE COSMOS

Visionary Idealism has been easier for Buddhists who, while having their disputes, would acknowledge that all ideas are of a secondary reality, a means of expression whose only aim is to release the mind from greed, hatred and delusion. Quite specifically, the Mahayana *Lotus Sūtra* likens these 'skilful means' to conjuring tricks to entice children out of a burning house. And in the *Prajnapāramita* teachings, '*Even final Nirvana ... is purely magical display, purely dream display*' presented to lure the mind out of its belief that the world of material form, of birth, sickness and death to which it seems bound is the only fundamental reality.⁵ What is emphasized instead is the need to establish an intention of unwavering compassion (aka 'the Christ') towards all manifestation. The basis of the cosmos may finally be ineffable, but in terms of human perceptions and action, what counts is not a thing out there (or in here), but a relationship of selflessness.

Once we approach the term 'God' from the mystic viewpoint, we draw nearer to the Buddhist view of Dhamma (as inactive Cosmic Order, the active Way based on that, and its Transcendent result). In this, the cosmos is the many-layered world (*loka*) of direct

*The holistic ideal percolated through mystic Christianity – influencing the mystics Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa – and surfaced to scholastic acclaim in the nineteenth century. More recently, Eriugena's return to Western culture has been signalled by the appearance of his portrait on the Irish £5 note. You can't get more mainstream than that.

experience. In the Buddhist presentation, this cosmos is held to consist of material form (*rūpa*), such as stars, trees and bodies, as well as the 'inner' mental domain of 'signifiers' (*nāma* = 'name'), that get encoded through the ongoing process of consciousness (*viññāna*). Consciousness is then neither objective nor independent; it is the dynamic 'moment-at-a-time' presentation of experience in terms of the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and the mental sense. Because seeing an apple is nothing like touching or tasting an apple, we might say that the mental sense, 'conceiving', *represents* or *translates* matter into a notion through synthesizing the data of the other senses with its own memories into an impression we call 'apple'. We thus assume this impression actually *is* the object 'out there'. The advertising industry counts on this assumption. Such impressions, however, may not be commonly shared: for example, a thunderstorm may be perceived as a sky spirit by some cultures and a meteorological phenomenon by others. It also establishes the immediate judgement of others, the 'pre-judice'. So I may perceive other people as barbaric because they don't wear the same clothes or ascribe to the same beliefs as my group; a woman may be seen as more desirable on account of pasting lipstick on her lips than if she hasn't participated in that daily cultural ritual ... and so on.

The knotty bit in all this is how belief in representation forms an apparently autonomous self – the conceiving witness. And even more knotty, how a collective belief in representation, a collective myth, generates a powerful collective self – one that can resist the collective myth, or the reasoned inquiry, of others. This process of belief then holds mentally created impressions, tokens, gods and other cultural expressions to be a universally true statement about the world 'out there'. If your cultural expression is that God gave us this created world to do what we like with, that leaves plenty of room for abuse and conquest.

Any belief system begins with 'conceiving', a mental act of categorizing 'internal' and 'external', through which the internal,

the conceiving, is held to be the act of a 'self' that is 'in here' and independent from the external. The result of this two-fold conceiving is that the *impression* of the external is held to be that self's *accurate experience* of an object (as with the apple, above). That object then becomes something to be gained or lost, to acquire or avoid; and is thus a potential target for greed and aversion. Thus there is the dependent arising of a big problem: a divided cosmos bound up with stress and suffering – *dukkha*. According to the Buddha, this *dukkha* can end through directly experiencing the dependent arising and impermanent nature of this cosmos:

... the Tathāgata has fully awakened to the arising of the cosmos; the Tathāgata has abandoned the arising of the cosmos. The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the ceasing of the cosmos; the Tathāgata has realized the ceasing of the cosmos. The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the way leading to the ceasing of the cosmos; the Tathāgata has fully developed the way leading to the ceasing of the cosmos.⁶ (A.4: 23)

This relationship may sound nihilistic, but abandoning and ceasing aren't annihilation of a real thing. The aspect of the cosmos that the Buddha is referring to is the subjective aspect, the representational consciousness that, under the influence of activations (*sankhārā*) rooted in ignorance, 'rises up' to present a world that is fundamentally divided. But just as the perceived and perceiver, and subsequent impressions and intentions are generated by the synthesizing mind, they can also 'cease' or subside when such activating tendencies cease. As in Zen: an apple is just an apple, not the mind's representation 'apple'.

However, rather than a deadening of awareness (with which the Buddha was clearly endowed), what is encouraged is a relinquishment of the compulsive drives (such as defending, gaining, owning) behind the activating tendencies. Then, when the biased representations or 'conceiving' of inner, outer, here and there, cease, there is non-objectifying *atammayatā*.

... having seen what can be seen, the Tathāgata does not conceive the seen, does not conceive the unseen, does not conceive what can be seen, does not conceive one who sees.⁶ (A.4: 24) [*and so on for all the sense bases*]

and

... a worthy one, rightly self-awakened – directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as ‘mine,’ does not delight in earth ... directly knows the seen. Directly knowing the seen as the seen, he does not conceive things about the seen [etc.]. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has comprehended it to the end, I tell you. [*this is repeated for all aspects of the cosmos*]

Why is that? Because he has known that delight’s the root of suffering & stress ... Therefore, with the total ending, fading away, cessation, letting go, relinquishment of craving, the Tathāgata has totally awakened to the unexcelled right self-awakening, I tell you.⁶ (M.1) (Thanissaro trans.)

For the average person, this may be difficult to grasp. The gist of it is that in direct knowing (as distinct from rational analysis) the active mind is not separate from the body or the rest of the cosmos; there isn’t an immaterial entity ‘in here’ observing a world ‘out there’. Check it out: if you try to form any impression of being here, you will experience yourself as a kaleidoscope of impressions based on sensory contact and mental activity. If you focus on what is directly experienced, and don’t follow the classification into future and past, you will experience phenomena welling up, some *calling themselves* ‘me’ or ‘her/them’, but of the same inconstant nature. The intensity with which any of these represents ‘me’ is related to pain, pleasure, attraction, aversion, worry and doubt. But that intensity is itself a part of the arising flow. What if that intensity were to abate, and to be abandoned and relinquished? This is the inquiry of the Buddhist Path.

*‘delight’ is akin to mental intoxication, rather than an act of appreciation.

Even simpler: what the Buddha *taught* was that this awakening could be brought about through cultivating the qualities of non-greed, kindness and deep clarity. This relatedness brings the mind out of the division that is ‘self-view’, and the way that that acts out in the world. So the ‘ceasing’ of the conceived cosmos is at the same time the healing of the living one.

OBJECTIVE SCIENCE AND THE TORTURE OF NATURE

We have become familiar with another view and relationship, one that contradicts integration and has had far-reaching effects. This is that of ‘dis-integration’ of a fundamentally divided cosmos in which nature is either a passive servant of humankind or dead matter. In tandem with the decline of nature, the notion of human ‘development’, an unknown concept in the Classical and Medieval cosmos, started to form. This myth began to be clearly expressed around the beginning of the seventeenth century in Europe, as scientific discovery challenged the hegemony of the Church.

A classic example of this new culture appears in the writings of the Lord Chancellor of England, Roger Bacon, who, with regard to nature, wrote: *‘to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able ... to lead and drive her afterwards ...’* Nature can be *‘forced out of her natural state and squeezed and moulded’*, and *‘tortured’* until she *‘takes orders from man ...’* (*De Augmentis Scientiarum*, 1623).⁷ It was a statement of the domination paradigm and what it could offer. In 1723, the English clergyman William Derham made the point even more bluntly: *‘We can, if need be, ransack the whole globe, penetrate into the bowels of the earth ... to acquire wealth.’*⁸ Thus in the course of 100 years, even the pitiful life that Bacon’s expression had granted nature had been snuffed out. While humans were on a path of development, she had disappeared, or was a corpse, a de-animated ‘it’.

The guiding theme of this de-animated culture is announced in the very term ‘*Augmentis Scientiarum*’ (= Development of Science). Whereas Eriugena’s work was vision, a revelation that includes Creation and the Uncreated, the ‘Science’ of Bacon sees a world that is other; raw material that has no essence. The vision was of a holistic cosmos suffused with divinity; the science was centred on human perspectives and our sole supremacy. This ‘humanist’ world initially configured Nature as a slave, and later as a commodity: thus the founding world-view behind capitalism was born.

Perhaps the forces of greed needed no ideological foundation; at any rate, the subsequent development of technology made a relationship of exploitation – such as the utilization of coal and oil as sources of energy – both practicable and profitable. Then the mechanism of joint-stock companies and credit made it possible for people to invest in a future based on such development. As Adam Smith explained in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), a cycle of endless growth and increasing prosperity would be our human destiny. So it must have seemed to some – and it still does – but the ‘our’ is a debatable point. A few people became stupendously wealthy, and living standards did improve to a degree in some countries. But the ten million Africans who died miserable deaths in slavery as a direct result of capitalist investment in sugar production wouldn’t have seen it that way. Neither would the virtually enslaved workers at the bottom of the production line in Chinese and Indonesian factories; nor the slaves working in London brothels in this present day and age.

Much could be said about the cause of this new world-view, including how new it really was. Humans have always had a strong degree of self-interest, and anything approaching equality has had to be enforced by law. Moreover, the details of the holistic vision were always those of a minority, and the majority experienced

themselves as separate from and trying to survive in a natural world that required them to farm, hunt and fish to survive, and attacked them with wild beasts, pestilence and inclement weather. Yet that paradigm also required them to respect and relate to a Nature that included the supernatural. The world might not have been an unwaveringly friendly place, but thanks were given for the harvests, and requests were made to the supernatural world that nets might be filled with fish and a safe homecoming achieved. The supernatural, on the mythic plane, mediated human action on the mundane plane.

One major humanist shift then was the supernatural's retreat from the affairs of the Earth, a retreat that progressed over the centuries into its absence from all human affairs, and culminated in its virtual extinction. Myth still lives on, but the dominant socio-cultural myth became that of materialist humanism: reality is divided between humans (who occupy the prime position) and animate or inanimate objects (who are secondary). Even in the human domain, working relationships developed from one of allegiance to a local lord entailing certain mutual responsibilities, to the gig economy, debt and zero-hour contracts that offer no employer-employee connection.

The devices that science made possible, and which furthered the development of materialist humanism offered marvels. The first two were the telescope (and its offspring, a family that includes the microscope and the camera) and the printing press (with computers and phones as its offspring). Together they gave birth to the television. Holding the telescope to his eye, Galileo (1564–1642) could observe the heavens out there being brought close by his device. The device allowed his mind to enter an aspect of the world to an unnatural degree without negotiating with any spiritual entity or going through a religious initiation. Objective science therefore had no need for a priestly elite: anyone could clamp an eye to the lens and probe the (physical) heavens. Furthermore, the act of observation

granted a kind of immunity whereby the rest of the world, including the observer's own body, disappeared. The heavens didn't react and didn't peer back; mutuality disappeared.

Now the human eye does by its nature exclude aspects of the cosmos (we can't see our heads), but the swelling family of optical devices so increased the gap between observed and observer as to support the assumption that the human, or at least an aspect of it, could step out of the cosmos altogether and be an unaffected observer. This illusion is such that occasionally a photographer gets so lost in it that he or she is mauled by the wild animal or shot by the soldier they were photographing. Meanwhile, the position of the mind is one of standing on the edge of the cosmos from its vantage point somewhere in the head behind the eyes. This is the home of the Cartesian ego of 'I think, therefore I am' – another child of the humanist revolution.

The written word, although used sparingly at the time of the Buddha, had been around for millennia when its great shift came about, just before Galileo built his telescope.* It also distanced the person from what he or she sensed. Whereas the verbal experience had been largely effected through speech (with a small amount of hand-written texts produced by monks, scribes and scholars), in the middle of the fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1398-1468) initiated a revolution by printing with movable metal type. Printing wasn't a new idea: Chinese monks had been printing using woodblocks since the ninth century. But the nature of Roman script, which uses letters rather than signs, supported movable type. This enabled individual letters to be fashioned and used again and again to create an enormous variety of texts. Whereas carving a woodblock that could only be used for one text was a painstaking process – one to be reserved for special items such as sutras – in Renaissance

*Galileo didn't build the first telescope, but hearing of one that had been created in the Netherlands in 1608, made a much more powerful one himself the next year.

Europe printing was comparatively easy, and cheap. Thus, as the idea caught on, it allowed for the mass production of books and the rapid dissemination of knowledge throughout Europe. This proved to be a supportive condition for the revolt against the Catholic Church that we subsequently called ‘the Reformation’.

Yet even as the dissemination of knowledge increased, the word was divorced from its erstwhile speaker. Important knowledge was less often a sound accompanied by facial gestures and proximity to a human body, and more frequently a seen and impersonal sign on a white sheet. The effect is similar to that of the telescope. Nowadays when we compose a digital text, we can use emoticons – images of human faces making an expression – to convey the mood of the speaker, so that, for example, a humorous remark isn’t taken seriously. This is because the written word lacks intimacy and specific embodied presence. It also loses responsibility: content on the Internet often allows for readers to comment, argue with and insult each unknown other in language that, if spoken face to face, would likely result in a fight. It’s quicker and requires less consideration than printing.

TELE-REALITY: THE VIRTUAL WORLD

As materialism segued into mechanism, the multi-layered, material-immaterial cosmos flattened to occupy only the sensory plane, where it could be observed and tinkered with. Devices helped it to disintegrate: I am separate from what I see through my device, and have no responsible relationship with it. The consequence of this shift of world-view is that our social domain is bonded to a reality that is independent from us and not responsible for our welfare, while yet dominating us. Invisible essences called ‘debt’ and ‘credit’ loom over us and have to be mediated by economic initiates. Words stand around us, guide, command and lure us as we move through the world. They leap unbidden from a host of devices that now offer us

images of the rest of the world and voices from others who we cannot see or touch. This is tele- (literally 'far-off') reality. It adds an amazing outreach to communication, but it dislocates us from our own living and locatable body. And what do we communicate anyway? News about an 'out there' we barely touch? Or comments about an 'in here' that is in need of contact? Estrangement is a feature of tele-reality. Consider again: what is presented via our televisions? The common shared medium is a representation of the living world selected and tailored, or even manufactured, through the television industry. Comic or tragic, this is not the here and now that we're actually alive in. Sitting in our 'living' (but isolated) rooms we see men shooting each other and cities going up in flames, and we can't tell if this is a movie or reality. In tele-reality, it doesn't matter that much. We can push a button and watch sport or a cartoon instead. In another tele-scenario, we make a phone call for a booking and a mechanized voice responds with set instructions. There's no negotiation because there's no one there. We inhabit a notional and dislocated cosmos.

This tele-reality is socially hazardous because it negates involvement and mutuality.* What, say, does the average person have in terms of the value of the virtual currency in his or her bank account? Such worth, unlike *puñña*, is not mediated by one's values or integrity. And when one's subjectivity is reduced to that of an isolated being located in the head amid a tangle of words, its plight resembles that of the figures presented in the twentieth-century literature of Samuel Beckett: heads, or just lips, incessantly twitter a stream of words that race between the anguished and the inane. The word is no longer the Divine infusing the cosmos, but a nervous activity of little significance and no responsibility in a world of disconnected objects.

So a growing disembodiment was another consequence of the great division. The telescope and the printing press partially

*I need to qualify this with an acknowledgement of the capacity that tele-communications can give in terms of disseminating information. However, the veracity of the information is another matter.

removed the body's presence from the interactive cosmos; what completed that process was making mechanization sacrosanct. The philosophical basis for this can be traced in the work of René Descartes (1596-1650), who analyzed the divided cosmos in terms of two domains: a pure intelligence shared by the human intellect and God, and a non-intelligent world of minerals, plants, and all bodies (including our own). In this analysis, an immaterial subject was divorced from the objective world, and placed in a position of total superiority. Objective science then followed through: Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726) calculated the workings of the measurable universe 'out there', with God outside it as the Great Engineer. Subsequently came the inventors Newcomen and Watt – who developed the machine (i.e. a device that is powered by inanimate means). A radical transformation of human reality was set rolling. It gave us power without responsibility; it all worked and made sense in terms of object-focused reality and the devices that measured it. Entranced by such power, we overlooked the fact that in terms of the subjective experience of inspiration, enthusiasm and compassion, or of even feeling welcome and comfortable with each other, objective science was profoundly ignorant.

As with the other developments of objective science, the machine presents so many benefits to humankind as to make its side-effects seem negligible. Trains, cars, engines, rifles, phones and drones and the rest carry out our wishes (when they work); but they also represent an increasing lack of physically-felt presence with relation to our actions and the earth through which we live. We see images, think and express ideas, but we barely share the same reality.* The machinery of the developed global economy brings with it daily accidents and death by machines (compare death by sharks with death by cars); as well as a vast degree of pollution, and

*This dislocation has developed to the extent that the Japanese have coined a word – *hikikomori* – for people who have withdrawn so far into tele-reality that they have become inaccessible to those around them.

the trivialization of the living cosmos – including the human body and mind. Our own living spaces, the cities and towns, are modified or built for the convenience of our machines. Consequently, the average human life is structured around the non-stop working day, one that extends into overtime – and consequent stress, insomnia, attention disorder and nervous breakdowns. The slave is driving its notional master.

And this is development.

Most people in the developed world now experience their environment through an outline provided by visual contact and filled in with their mental (or tele-) impressions. They will often have the experience of sitting immobile in a car, train or plane as the world streams around them – with no corresponding shift in muscle tone or vital energy and with no effect on the skin. The organic ‘essence’ of embodied presence is lost. The natural world glows from the screen and the page without the touch of wind or sunlight or the sound and involvement of the biosphere. Its destruction is regretted but considered unavoidable; the mechanist view is our unwavering guide.

Mainstream religion hasn’t helped. In Europe, the bond between religion and society snapped with the Church repudiating Galileo and all he stood for. Science therefore, went its own way, convinced that reality was only that which could be measured by its devices. That view has captured the culture. Mainstream Christianity has for too long clung to a world-view that had become increasingly irrelevant; its own internal split brought forth a Protestant, anti-mystical, anti-sacramental view. And neither could carry beauty, awe, and the fitting response to the natural world.

So the mainstream is left with tele-, rather than human, development and the extinction of nature. It is indeed a cruel irony that the technological advance initiated by Galileo scanning the heavens should have resulted in a scenario whereby, although we

can receive photographic images of the surface of Pluto, when we look up, atmospheric and light pollution prevents us from seeing all but the brightest stars.



The Redress of Nature

THE EARTH THAT I TREAD UPON IS NOT A DEAD, INERT MASS. IT IS A BODY, HAS A SPIRIT,
IS ORGANIC, AND FLUID TO THE INFLUENCE OF ITS SPIRIT, AND TO WHATEVER PARTICLE
OF THAT SPIRIT IS IN ME.⁹

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

NATURE IS GOOD FOR YOU

In the early months of 2016, I was in South Africa, and as an unforeseen consequence was walking in the Drakensberg mountains with Gavin Robertson. Some twenty or more years previously, Gavin had been working in conflict resolution, and one of his major challenges had been that of resolving the bloodshed between the young men who supported the African National Congress and those affiliated to the Inkatha Freedom Party. As part of one project, he offered to take six men of each group into the mountains, unarmed, as a way to resolve the conflict. Against all odds (especially when one man discovered that a member of the other group had killed his brother), it worked. The resolution didn't come around through reasoned argument or legislation, but through being in a wilderness which both required them to bond in order to survive, and also offered a presence of such primary power that it connected these men to something more

fundamental than their political affiliations. One man reported that for the first time he found himself stepping back from and witnessing his emotions, rather than immediately acting on them: he touched into a place of calm detachment. Nature had brought around a shift.

As previous cultures were well aware, spending time in the wilds has a healing effect; nowadays that is needed more than ever. In a moving article in *Aeon* magazine (Jan. 22, 2014), erstwhile New Yorker Jill Neimark writes of her ‘*toxicant-induced lack of tolerance*’ (TILT). TILT is a condition in which the immune system sustains too extreme or prolonged an exposure to toxins, such as ‘*fresh paint, synthetic carpet ... flame retardants, fabric softener, pesticides*’ – the list is long, but it sketches the domestic environment of millions. This environmental illness rendered her bedridden, tense and reactive (even to her own clothes) as well as hypersensitive to noise. Eventually she resorted to camping in the woods – and went through big changes in terms of bodily and mental health:

‘Rumination and anxiety seemed to melt away ... Where once I could barely walk to my bathroom, I now walk miles on nature trails and country roads. I become cold-adapted in winter, cooking in a hoodie and sandals, in temperatures that might have formerly made me shiver – and research backs me up there, too (cold thermogenesis, as it’s called, burns brown fat and raises antioxidant levels ...).’

So living within nature not only brings around a shift in perception, it also can help to address a growing number of human mental and physical ailments, allergies and immune system malfunctions that come through living in a synthetic environment.

REVIEW, REVOLUTION AND ROMANTICISM

A review of nature began as the Machine Age accelerated. Whereas Newton had presented an organized cosmos engineered by a rational God, his contemporary, Baruch Spinoza of Amsterdam (1632-1677), proposed an alternative view. In his five-part work

on ethics, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* (1677), Spinoza proposes the existence and unitary nature of a single ‘substance’ that comprises all of reality, which he called ‘God or Nature’ (*Deus sive Natura*). From this essence emanate an infinite number of attributes and modes.* Although, as Spinoza was Jewish, it was the rabbinical court rather than the Papacy that excommunicated him, his vision in many ways replicated and received the same response from the prevailing orthodoxy as that of Eriugena. There was another important difference, however: the printing press could now make such metaphysical propositions available to the general public. Consequently, Spinoza’s work came to provide the spiritual underpinning of a growing movement that sanctified nature.

Another major influence was the Irishman, Edmund Burke. In 1757, Burke published his essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* – which represented a radical return to the subjective experience in which the intuition of the terrible, the vast and the uncontrollable forms a part. This was the forerunner of a change of view in terms of aesthetics, philosophy and religion that amounted to a revolution.

The Swiss-French social philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was an important thinker in this new view of the cosmos, which was retrospectively called the ‘Romantic’ movement. In his writings, he advocated the return to a (theoretical) ‘natural state’: ‘[N]othing is so gentle as man in his primitive state, when placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man.’¹⁰ Although Rousseau himself didn’t propose it, this idealised ‘man in his primitive state’ morphed into the Noble Savage, the unlettered sage much loved by Romantic writers.** His descriptions of Swiss scenery initiated ‘*alpinisme*’: the Alps were

*An ‘attribute’ is the perception of an abstract concept or essence, akin to Eriugena’s ‘Cause’; a ‘mode’ is an existing thing that derives from an attribute, as with Eriugena’s ‘Effect’.

**Rousseau himself proposed that the return to the natural state was just a stage in a redevelopment that would be completed within civic society. But the culture’s need for myth took over.

no longer experienced as a scene of horrid desolation, but as a wonderland for hikers.

This new view of Nature, both as the created world and human nature, was proposed by poets and philosophers, accepted in the public domain and evidenced by a movement away from the formalism of verse, painting, music and courtly protocols towards forms that advocated the free expression of 'natural' subjectivity. (Compare Bach to Beethoven, Pope to Wordsworth.) Whereas seventeenth-century society had favoured the formal arrangements of the gardens of Versailles, in the middle of the eighteenth, the naturalistic 'English garden style' developed by 'Capability' Brown was the fashion. Around the same time, the visionary poet and engraver William Blake was railing against the 'dark Satanic mills' of industrialized England and producing his own vision of the sublime and the beautiful in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight.¹¹

Romantic themes, developed by Schelling, Hegel, Schiller and the Schlegel brothers in Germany, and by Wordsworth and Coleridge in England, stemmed from a belief in the authenticity of spontaneous emotion. This authentic subjectivity was seen as an emanation from a divine source, an essence that would arise and flow best in an uncivilized environment. Wordsworth's poetry, for example, sees nature rather than the Church as the setting to commune with the sublime Mystery, which, although never referred to as God, is godly and akin to the Neo-Platonic Ideal (and Eriugena's 'Cause'). Other uncivilized environments might be entered by means of opium. Thus the Romantic world-view, with its mythic and narcotic elements, arose in opposition to Newton's Divine Clock.

The Romantic cosmos was alive and potentially inclusive of a Godhead, but its entrance was through subjective emotion, rather than through a corporate body, aka the Church with its prescribed rituals. So Romanticism countered the Mechanist and Rationalist perspectives and mainstream Christianity with its own belief: that a humanity of unfettered individualism could be guided by its own insights rather than by law and order. The idea was that

Transcendentalist Philosophy

IV.4

To the Transcendental Philosophy, nature is nothing but the organ of self-consciousness, and everything in nature is only necessary because only through such a nature can self-consciousness be achieved.

Schelling (1775-1854)

...

In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign ... Standing on the bare ground ... all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; all the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me, I am part or particle of God.

R.W. Emerson: *Nature: Introduction* (1836)

...

This relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poet, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men ... There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms; and day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, preëxist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and are what they are by the

virtue of preceding affections, in the world of spirit ... The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world.

R.W. Emerson: 'Language', Chapter IV in *Nature*: Brooks Atkinson (ed.), *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (NY: Random House, 1940).

...

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as controlled with a freedom and culture merely civil – to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.

What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whether we will walk? I believe there's a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we will walk.

Henry David Thoreau: 'Walking', Bradford Torrey (ed.), *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, Journal, September 16, 1851 and April 30, 1852 (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906).

since this guidance emanated from a Nature that manifested in our sublime emotions, people would naturally learn to live in harmony with the biosphere.

This was an optimistic belief. Harmony, as opposed to conformity, arises when different entities strike a common but subjectively experienced note; but what that note is, and how it can be heard and played by humans of ranging dispositions without sacrificing their individuality has been an issue ever since. If our subjectivity is to be seen as of a higher or more authentic nature than our position and duties in society, how are our greedy or violent impulses curbed? The French Revolution saw the overthrow of the old order – but it wasn't replaced by Rousseau's 'gentle' natural state. As Christianity had long been configured as a backing for the authoritarian status quo, new lines of religious thought were needed.

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND THE OVER-SOUL

The writings of Friedrich Schelling had a strong influence on a group of thinkers who flourished in New England around the mid-19th century. They were subsequently called the 'Transcendentalists', and their line of thought came to underpin environmentalism in America. The leading thinker was Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), a Unitarian (i.e. broad-Church Christian) minister, who, starting from the premise of a Creator God, emphasized the all-embracing aspect of the Divine by positing the experience of God as being an inner light in all of us. This inner light is our individual aspect of the 'Over-Soul' that dwells within all Creation. Schelling had echoed the understanding of the Western holistic tradition by proposing that nature consisted of an objective material aspect and a subjective creative aspect that were non-separable. Emerson echoed that, along with the primordial unity of the spirit – the 'Over-Soul':

And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith.

‘The Over-Soul’ (extract) (1841)¹²

Transcendentalism also attempted to include those religious traditions of the East whose works became available (in translation) in the nineteenth century. The Vedic tradition with its union between self and Brahman, or the Higher Self, was easier to include than Buddhism with its not-self, although another Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, did get one of the first sutras to appear in the West – Eugène Burnouf’s translation of the *Lotus Sutra* published (in Emerson’s *The Dial* in 1844).*

Despite their pioneering work, neither the Romantics nor the Transcendentalists were able to present a way of life that included all aspects of the cosmos that people of their age found themselves to be a part of. Their mystical intuitions didn’t evolve a satisfactory ethical outreach. Romanticism promoted a sacred communion between nature and humanity, but provided an inadequate vehicle to harmonize the beautiful and the sublime, the Heaven and Hell of human nature. It also couldn’t match the skills and material progress of rationality and objective science. Lacking in objective standards, Romanticism diffused over a range of esoteric mysticism,

*(The translation from the French was by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody.) Although the apparent non-dualism of Emerson’s vision approximates to the Buddha’s dependently arising cosmos, it is significantly different. Whereas the Buddha advocates the non-arising of the differentiated cosmos – that is, the ceasing of a dynamic – Emerson postulates a ‘One’, an immaterial essence, into which entities merge and from which they arise. Unable to grasp the concept of *nibbāna*, his explorations of the early translations led Emerson to understand Buddhism as a denial of the physical world and a fatalistic surrender to the dark side of life.

nationalist mythologies, socialist political theories and literary styles. Its emotional and intuitive wellspring pushed against sexual taboos, but could turn into self-obsessive whirlpools. On its fringes were Arthurian legends and macabre literary works, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, while a blend of fantasy and nostalgia inspired 'follies' – fake ruins and replicas of castles and classical buildings – to be built in the sprawling estates of the gentry. So despite being associated with masterpieces of literature, music and art, the word 'romantic' now carries the meaning 'naive fantasy'.

The Transcendentalists had a sounder ethical basis, and broadened the enquiry into the subjective domain by looking beyond Christianity and the West; however, they also didn't accomplish a realistic rapprochement with mechanization. While Thoreau did live on the edge of civic society for a couple of years, it was on Emerson's land at Walden; he would return to town for occasional meals and social contact. The reality was that humans needed a farmed and civilized life; the question that remains is how an increasing human population can accomplish that while respecting other creatures and the land.

By and large, the Transcendentalists were theorists and writers with little experience of engaging with the mud, blood and rain of the nature that they eulogized. So they missed the point that harmony with a nature of many different beings could only occur if they could all be allowed to speak, and be listened to. Meanwhile, even as they were writing, the powers-that-be of the United States were following the myth that nature was a limitlessly abundant source of human welfare, and that it was a (white) human right to exploit it. Hence the buffalo were slaughtered to the tune of fifty million, and the indigenous people were subjugated and displaced in order to transform the Great Plains into farms and ranches.

So throughout these two centuries, while contemplation of the beautiful and the sublime deepened and broadened on the Ideal

plane, the aspects of the cosmos that most people and animals were experiencing were being re-formed around conformity to the logic of the machine. And in that, the epithets ‘vast and terrible’ were accurate. The American wilderness was systemically converted into cornfields and pasture, the skies polluted with smoke and the water with chemicals and trash. And shortly after a new century opened on an era of further and faster development, a generation of men were butchered in the First World War. The Romantic myth of Frankenstein’s Creature – half-artificial, half biological – had come to represent mechanized humanity, lost, lumbering and destructive, in a horribly realistic way.

NATURE, IDEAL AND REAL

The drawback with the Romantic and Transcendental movements is that, like the Western tradition in general, they referred to the Ideal, and neither nature nor humans are ideal. They interpreted a principle, rather than establishing a way of life from living in the natural world. The principle of equality doesn’t fit with unbridled individuality; relational balance is required. And even wonderful abstract principles don’t fit into how experience happens. Nineteenth-century Evangelical Christianity had some great principles, and campaigned to make slavery illegal; but, although it supported a kinder version of the Supreme God, it also held the notion that theirs was the only way to access Him. Indigenous people were heathens and savages. Then even though terms like ‘God’, ‘freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ could be coined, any one of the native peoples who were displaced and/or decimated might very well ask ‘what freedom?’ and ‘whose justice?’; and the entire biosphere could rightly insist: ‘If we’re part of God’s creation, when do we get equal rights?’ What people find difficult to accept is the fact that ideals prove to be either partial or impotent, because they issued from the minds of humans.

The very word 'ideal' derives from the Greek '*eidōs*' which meant 'visible form', and at the beginning of the age when writing became popular, Plato 'translated' experience into visible letters, for the purpose of writing *about* it. Prior to that, the word was spoken and emitted from a body in the context that included a speaker, voice tones and body language, and whatever customs and situation were needed to create such an occasion. In the pre-literate world from which the sacred emanated, the Word of God breathed across the waters; it wasn't a lecture or an instruction manual: it was alive and potent. In the etiquette of communicating with non-human subjects – mountains, skies, birds, spirits – ritual, auspicious occasion, and non-human cries and actions would be used, along with sustained and careful attention. In fact, a receptive and respectful attention needed to be fully *given* to the 'form' of a being in order for it to be properly apprehended: the aboriginal sang the land, and the shaman 'became' a spirit-animal, so that the locus of meaning was sustained and lived. Again, put aside the cultural expression; the meaning is that when relationship is based on mutuality and integration, the cosmos is experienced as a weave of shared subjectivities, '*abiding in its phenomenal expression*', to quote Dogen. For those who place themselves outside it and merely conceive it, there is no meaning to life on this Earth.

The human mind is endowed with the capacity to think. In this capacity, the act of conceiving can generate an Ideal, but for truth and action, what is important is the ethical basis of the conceiving. This ethical basis must rest not on idealistic righteousness but on an empathic relationship that is structured around respect and compassion. When we get intoxicated with ideas, that relationship suffers: as with the biosphere, which is 'conceived' largely as the object of human needs and interests. Then that objectifying rebounds: other people become objects, and we ourselves become objects of our self-critical minds, anxious, overbearing and restlessly engaged

in self-modifying endeavours. This is because the reality of what happens is *never* conceivable; its fullness isn't an object: experience is dynamic and responsive. And it is only through ignoring or stressing this organic and shifting nature that we can work at a pace that is compatible with the machine and its system. Which is what happens as machine logic takes over.

Witnessing that stress, the Romantics and Transcendentalists did give expression to an authentic urge to be natural, a longing for essence that persists as their enduring legacy. However garbled the human voices, it was through them that nature began to speak out against the clamour of the machine and the dazzle of its material benefits.

MUIR AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

By the end of the nineteenth century, action to redress the cosmos began to manifest. In environmental terms, the initiator was John Muir (1838-1914). Naming himself a disciple of Thoreau but literally getting down to earth, Muir immersed himself in the wilderness for decades, carrying '*only a tin cup, a handful of tea, a loaf of bread, and a copy of Emerson.*' He explored the biota of Southern Ontario, walked 1,000 miles from Kentucky to Florida, lived in the wilderness that through his efforts became Yosemite, the first National Park (in 1890), and co-founded the Sierra Club, an organization whose stated aims are: '*To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; To educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.*' With its key concerns being Land Management, elimination of the use of coal, and the prevention of dam construction in national parks, the Sierra Club continues to gather donations and express itself politically in opposing candidates for government whom it considers unfriendly to the American environment. It is also a member of the BlueGreen Alliance, a coalition of environmental groups and labour unions.

Thus another ‘-ism’, environmentalism, was born, and the modern conservation movement gathered around a set of principles – that of care and custodianship for the biosphere – and a scientific approach. That is, the movement was founded not just on idealism, but on living in and observing the ways of nature with the intention to learn and even adjust human behaviour to suit it. Considering the voracious and self-oriented tendencies of our species, this is a great and significant step. That the movement uses scientific methods of exploration and inquiry also bodes well for the unification of the cosmos: there’s no going back on science, so it’s best to turn its methods towards integration. Thus even as Romanticism came to be regarded as stale and fanciful, and the movement in the arts was towards the abstract and the deconstruction of Postmodernism, environmentalism steadily gained both momentum and scientific consensus. In the ensuing decades scientists such as Rachel Carson, James Lovelock and James Hansen would contribute data and analysis that spelt out uncomfortable environmental truths; as well as prognoses that have turned out to be largely correct.

Environmentalism is now a global movement that includes an extending community; organizations such as Greenpeace, World Wide Fund for nature, Earthjustice and The Rewilding Institute have sprung up and received popular support. As a whole, despite antipathy from major industrial corporations, they represent the major resistance to the exploitation of the planet; even undertaking confrontational action to publicise a ‘crime against nature’. In the UK alone, environmental organizations now attract more members than either political parties or the Church. This has effects on the political body, and has brought around environmental protection policies and a near-global consensus on tackling climate change. National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries are now a feature of nations throughout the world. It is common for people to seek wilderness for recreation, regeneration and realignment.

With that comes the understanding that, just as our activities threaten the biosphere, they also threaten our health and sanity. We arise within this biosphere, with its non-conceptual intelligences, rhythms and interdependence. So it's not just that we need to preserve nature, but that we need nature to preserve an essential feature of what it is to be human. A forgotten contract must be renewed, and for this the most potent ritual as always is human sacrifice. But in Buddhist terms, such sacrifice is bloodless: it is one of abandoning our claim to supremacy.

The consequences of such a redress of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation are far-reaching. Such a redress asks much of us. The Western philosophical tradition began with Socrates' statement: *'trees and fields won't teach me anything, but men in the city will'* (*Phaedrus*), but the 'men in the city' have failed to teach us how to manage living on this planet, with each other or even with ourselves. We need to experience each other (and the rest of the cosmos) in a relationship of mutuality. A growth in environmental concern, and the contemplation and service of wilderness areas illustrate that a redress of our relationship with nature is taking place; it may effect a healing yet.



Spending Time Within Nature

While walking in embodied awareness as before, give open attention to the life forms around you. Notice their movements and rhythms – they may seem erratic and chaotic. Leaves, squirrels, birds, waves – bobbing, scurrying, pausing, swooping. Notice the young, old and fallen trees, notice what habitat and food they offer. Reflect on nature: how the twisted and the fallen fit in along with the new shoots. How birth, ageing and death are of equal value to the whole system. How there is no waste: everything feeds and feeds on something else; supports and is supported. How, although beings kill other beings, nothing poisons the whole. This is nature, arising in a multitude of forms, that sense and respond to each other. Take any detail, a leaf, an ant, and consider how it fits into the whole system – what it depends upon and what depends on it, including the elements of soil, water, warmth and air.

Then step back out of the details, and get a feel for the movement and rhythms of nature as a whole. Nothing goes straight.

Notice that your mind operates in the same way. Watch it as if you're watching birds and squirrels – be attentive, curious, and sympathetic. This is human nature. Other than through a mental action of naming or inclining, there is no absolute distinction between you and the world around you. Both the sense of 'myself' and 'the world' are co-dependently arising processes.

...

It is especially useful to spend a day, or a night and a day or two, out in the natural domain. Go basic, with minimal toiletries, and no reading material. The weight you're carrying should be something that requires no extraordinary effort. Read a hiking guide before you go, check the weather, and take reasonable precautions.

It's probably good to *not* attempt a walk that is particularly strenuous or adventurous at first. You don't want to have to spend the walking time calculating distances, calibrating risks, dealing with exhaustion, or with too much attention required on externals. This will impair your broad field of receptivity, or bring on 'destination fever'.

Instead, try to get into a rhythm whereby your body is leading the walk as much as your mind. Practise pausing for five or ten slow, easeful breaths on a regular basis, or, when it feels good, pause and check in with the environment with awareness through the body, and through hearing as well as seeing. Every couple of hours or so, sit down to observe, feel and listen to nature for ten minutes or more. Also explore touching, the sense that immediately reports on moisture, heat, movement and texture. Bark, leaf, soil, sand, water: notice the activation of the tactile sense and the labelling of the impression. Widen your awareness to notice how the effects of a touch immediately resonate through a wider bodily field. That is, as you touch, you are touched; how the fingertips come alive with a flush, and how there is a heightening alertness in the arm. Be aware and pause over any responses that come up.

This sense of immediate connection – in this case between fingertips and arm – is called the cohesive sense, or figuratively 'the water element'. It's true: our nervous system is like a lake of intelligence, and whenever even a leaf drops onto it, ripples spread. Water is the most powerful connector and source of harmony – and our bodies are mostly water. To feel one's own flow connected to the interconnecting and responsive natural realm is a regeneration.

The other elements that occur within our awareness and in the natural world are: 'earth' – the sense of solidity, of occupying space and resisting pressure; 'fire' – heat, light, and the sense of vitality that lights up the impulses; and 'air' – the movement of things, of wind and breath that gently or fiercely pushes. Contemplate these internally and externally, and in the meeting of the two domains.

If you're just out for the day, try to be in the natural domain as the sun goes down. Listen to the effects on living creatures. If you'd like to, extend your walk into the period of darkness; use minimal light to guide yourself – flash a beam briefly every few paces, pause to let your eyes adjust and then attempt to walk in the darkness. Can you adjust to walk under moonlight?

If you can, spend a night outside. Attend to the effects of the darkness on other creatures, and notice how the other senses, especially the mind, become more attuned and attentive when seeing is no longer so dominant. Listen to the night.

Use minimal covering for the night; a small tent is a maximum – you don't want to be that separate from the world around you. Wake before dawn to be with what happens when light returns – trees and plants change their 'breath' to breathing out oxygen, and birds come into their chorus. It is an especially fresh and vibrant time; let its atmosphere enter into you.

House of Many Windows: Pluralism and Integration

NIGRODHA, YOU MAY THINK: 'THE ASCETIC GOTAMA SAYS THIS IN ORDER TO GET DISCIPLES.' BUT YOU SHOULD NOT REGARD IT LIKE THAT. LET HIM WHO IS YOUR TEACHER REMAIN YOUR TEACHER. OR YOU MAY THINK: 'HE WANTS US TO ABANDON OUR RULES.' BUT...LET YOUR RULES REMAIN YOUR RULES. OR YOU MAY THINK: 'HE WANTS US TO ABANDON OUR WAY OF LIFE.' ... LET YOUR WAY OF LIFE REMAIN AS IT WAS ... I DO NOT SPEAK FOR ANY OF THESE REASONS. THERE ARE, NIGRODHA, UNWHOLESOME THINGS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN ABANDONED, TAINTED, CONDUCTIVE TO REBIRTH, FEARFUL, PRODUCTIVE OF PAINFUL RESULTS IN THE FUTURE ... IT IS FOR THE ABANDONMENT OF THESE THINGS THAT I TEACH DHAMMA. IF YOU PRACTISE ACCORDINGLY, THESE TAINTED THINGS WILL BE ABANDONED ... AND YOU WILL ATTAIN TO AND DWELL IN THIS VERY LIFE BY YOUR OWN INSIGHT AND REALIZATION, IN THE FULLNESS OF PERFECTED WISDOM.

UDUMBARIKA-SĪHANĀDA SUTTA (D.25: 23)

THE CRISIS THAT THREATENS OUR PLANET, WHETHER SEEN FROM ITS MILITARY, ECOLOGICAL, OR SOCIAL ASPECT, DERIVES FROM A DYSFUNCTIONAL AND PATHOLOGICAL NOTION OF THE SELF ... IT IS A DELUSION THAT THE SELF IS SO SEPARATE AND FRAGILE THAT WE MUST DELINEATE AND DEFEND ITS BOUNDARIES ... ENDLESSLY ACQUIRE AND ENDLESSLY CONSUME, AND ... BE IMMUNE TO WHAT WE DO TO OTHER BEINGS ... CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE, AND SYSTEMS SCIENCE IN PARTICULAR, GOES FARTHER IN CHALLENGING OLD ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT A DISTINCT, SEPARATE, CONTINUOUS SELF, BY SHOWING THAT THERE IS NO LOGICAL OR SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR CONSTRUING ONE PART OF THE EXPERIENCED WORLD AS 'ME' AND THE REST AS 'OTHER.' ... OUR VERY BREATHING, ACTING AND THINKING ARISE IN INTERACTION WITH OUR SHARED WORLD THROUGH THE CURRENTS OF MATTER, ENERGY, AND INFORMATION THAT MOVE THROUGH US AND SUSTAIN US.¹

JOANNA MACY



Engaged Disengagement: the Shaping of Modern Buddhism

THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS ... MEANS THAT LOVING-KINDNESS (METTĀ) AND COMPASSION (KARUṆĀ) MUST BE REAL. WE MUST BE WILLING TO SHARE THE SUFFERING OF OUR FELLOW BEINGS – BE THEY HUMAN, ANIMAL OR NATURAL. THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION DOES NOT ONLY MEAN TO CLOSE ONE'S EYES TO THE WORLD PROBLEMS AND SAY, 'WE ARE ALL RIGHT, JACK.'²

SULAK SIVARAKSA

THE NEW SHORELINE

It should by now come as no surprise to read that the Buddhism presented in the West in the nineteenth century was an adaptation. What is more surprising is that within a century a range of Buddhist forms have arisen, some wary of calling themselves 'Buddhist', that are yet roughly homogeneous, or at least cooperative, and that unify around themes such as the value of ethics and meditation in dealing with the struggles of Western society. The Buddhist umbrella has stretched to cover the empowerments and deities of Tibetan Buddhism, the anti-mystical approach of secular Buddhists, the mantra-reliant culture of Japanese Nichiren and the backwoods stance of the Thai Forest tradition. This co-existence and even cross-fertilisation was made possible by

the fact that in the West there was a willingness to learn from a non-Western intelligence – and that could include any Buddhist (or Vedic, or Sufi) tradition; whereas from the Buddhist perspective, all its traditions were equally non-native and all had to meet and adapt to Western circumstances.

Dhamma had never landed straight from the Buddha's lips onto a blank or static page, and the pages of the West from the 1800s onwards were both full and rapidly flipping. There was both a dramatic growth in mechanization and urbanization, and an equally dramatic development of rational science – to the point that its claim to the truths of the Universe superseded that of the Christian religion. Evolution, and specifically the upwards arc of human evolution, was another popular theme: Western rational humanism was considered to be the leading edge of a human development that was guided by science and offered ever-improving material welfare. (Especially for some.) And yet ... at the peak of its wave this tide hit its own undercurrents and broke up into turbulent eddies.

Charles Darwin's breakthrough theory of Evolution was given a social interpretation, and used to verify the claim that the Westerner was of the most advanced 'race'. This race was named 'Caucasian' after a skull found in the Caucasus mountains – whose large cranial cavity 'proved' that Westerners were brainier than other humans. Smart intellects could then use that myth to justify any supremacist ideology, from European colonialism, to America's Manifest Destiny, to the Nazi's 'Aryan' myth of the Master Race.

Other unforeseen cross-currents were less damaging, but equally unsettling. In the early years of the twentieth century, Einstein and Max Plank shattered the known and predictable universe. The fixed machine of Newtonian physics was soon to be replaced by a relative and dynamically interdependent universe. Simply speaking, the stuff of this 'quantum' universe all depended on where you stood and what measuring stick you used. Space and time were no longer fixed and

separate absolutes; energy replaced matter as the bottom line, and it operated according to laws that defied classical physics. Later in that century, a new mathematics of natural systems – such as weather and the flow of water – was also formulated. Taking these apparent irregularities as the new norm, and using a geometry based on the ‘fractal’ replicating patterns found in nature, it was fittingly called ‘Chaos theory’.

If chaos was to be the new norm and fractal the basic pattern, political events helped to presage that. In another corner of the cosmos, as the undercurrent of domination surfaced in the struggle to find out which of its powers was the *most* dominant, Europe tore itself apart with the First World War. Nineteen million people died, four empires with their thrones cracked up and European supremacy came to an end. New states formed, and new states of mind: Christianity survived, but as one religion among several. Christendom, on the other hand, was finished: God, King and Country were not a unity and could no longer be a rallying cry. The United States moved into the gap, but the Wall St. Crash and Depression of the 1930s brought immense hardship and undermined the solidity of gold-based capitalism: to an increasing extent, money would take another very relative basis, that of credit, as its foundation. By the end of the century, crypto-currencies – cloud money – were being created and used.

Liberal democracy was also no longer the gold standard. Its failures to avert the above catastrophes turned people to Communism, Fascism and Nazism. Absolute rule, military juntas and feudal monarchies still occupied seats of power in many parts of the world. American defeat in the Vietnam War, worsened by its inability to meet and respond to those of its citizenry who protested against it, gave democracy another black eye. By the end of the century, a surprising number of people who had been given the vote were so disillusioned by the political system that they didn’t bother to use it.

Even more fundamentally, the notion of self based on a unitary mind, soul or static consciousness was revealed as not so by the new science of psychology. William James and Sigmund Freud empirically demonstrated that human awareness is flooded by an ever-morphing flow of conscious moments, and that what we take as our 'self' is really a dynamic lattice of mind-states, moods, and drives. To extend the understanding of mind beyond the range of thought and chosen intentions, the term 'psyche' (in Greek myth, the consort of Eros) was applied – a reference that closely resembled the Buddhist *citta*. Of great significance was the revelation that much of the psyche is 'unconscious' (i.e. out of the normal range of access, and involuntary); at its imaginative-mythic level, memories, foundational perceptions of self and other, and past events were stored in dramatic form, with the potential to project onto and thereby distort perceptions of present events. To an increasing extent, it was acknowledged that we're not who we think we are.

As all these dominating paradigms faltered or fell, it became clear that the unified cosmos had only appeared so because of being locked by beliefs that were empirically unsustainable. As faith in the relevance of a common order declined, the locus of meaning became the individual and the subjective perspective. '*God is dead*' is the famous remark of the late nineteenth-century philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, but among his other pithy comments were: '*There are no facts, only interpretations*' and, '*There are no eternal facts, as there are no absolute truths.*' His was a logical development from the Romantics, with their emphasis on the moral authority of the individual conscience; but this line of thought led to the Existentialist viewpoint that we are alone in an indifferent cosmos. Indeed, as the twentieth century moved on, even the new '-isms' came to appear partial, fallible or downright destructive: Marxism started out as an economic theory aimed at an equal sharing of resources but was subsequently politicized into Communism – used

by Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot to back the extermination of as many of their own countrymen than the global total of those who died in the Second World War. Rather as an evolution to a new order, a spiralling into universal disorder became the theme of the twentieth century, and society became prone to depression, hedonism, cynicism or indifference to life itself.

In such a turbulent ocean, however, people were striking out for new ground. The optimistic view would say that a new shore, a common ground, could be made out. And its basis was the Earth as a living and shared entity, and an awareness that could be open to diversity and cooperation rather than any kind of dominance. In Buddhist terms, this is the mind without clinging. And the underpinning of that was peace of mind, *nibbāna*. The ancient texts occasionally referred to *nibbāna* as ‘the island’ in the turbulent floods of change; the metaphor accurately conveyed a real and growing need.

BUDDHISM, CULTURE AND COUNTER-CULTURE

Western Buddhism was at first a textual transmission occasioned in France by Eugène Burnouf, and in Britain by T. W. Rhys Davids at the Pali Text Society. This work, although foundational, was largely for those – scholars and antiquarians, but also retired colonial administrators – whose interest had been stirred by contact with other cultures. In previous transmissions of Buddhism across Asia, it had been the exemplars and polemicists of the living tradition, not academics, who had captured popular interest. Although Chinese Buddhists were emigrating to the West Coast of America from the early years of the nineteenth century onwards, their culture didn’t enter the mainstream.* Meanwhile, where Western powers took

*They weren’t the first to come this way: Hui Shen and his fellow missionaries made the trip between 458 and 499 CE, but, other than by leaving some carvings in stone in Mexico, made no lasting impression.

Gaia House: Insight and Environment

The efforts (and the name) of **Gaia House**, a contemporary Insight (= Buddhist) meditation centre in the UK, illustrate the concerns shared by the Dhamma community. The following is from their website: gaiahouse.co.uk.

‘Gaia House endeavours to act as an environmentally responsible organisation. For many years, we have been making efforts to embody teachings of interdependence and compassion by living in harmony with the earth and all our systems of support. While we are aware there will always be more we can do to operate in as harmless a manner as possible, there are many practical steps we have taken already.

Electricity: In addition to encouraging frugal use of electricity, we have alternated between two electricity suppliers over the past decade – Green Energy and Good Energy. Both companies offer electricity from 100% renewable sources i.e. wind, solar & water.

Heating: We have a 200kw biomass boiler run on sustainable woodchip, sourced just 7 miles away, which generates our heat and hot water with virtually zero carbon contribution. It is highly efficient and provides huge financial and carbon savings compared to our old oil burning system...

Hot water: This is supplied by our biomass boiler but when the sun is out the solar panels on the Hermitage Wing roof automatically switch on to generate hot water for the house.

Showers: These are currently mostly electric to ensure everyone has constant hot water at peak times. However, future building plans will develop our plumbing systems so we can

run those showers off the biomass system, further reducing our electricity consumption.

Water: We are on mains water supply but the daily usage here is very low thanks to the conscientious approach to resources by all those that stay here. We did sink a borehole to try and find a source to supply us, but being on the edge of a limestone belt, this did not produce enough for our needs. Increased rain water harvesting is on our agenda within our future building plans.

Wind energy: We have investigated this as a possible energy source but results showed insufficient wind to generate a constant supply.

Windows: Where possible, removable secondary glazing has been installed around the house. There are areas, such as the main house (Denbury) which has limitations because of the listed building status (Grade II) and the size and functionality of the old wooden sash windows.

Insulation: The newer wings (Hermitage, Garden & Meditation Hall) have cavity wall insulation filling. Loft insulation is present wherever there is space to put it. We have had a Thermal Imaging Survey carried out on the house to highlight areas where energy is being lost and where we can make improvements...

Walled garden and grounds: Everything is grown and tended to organically here at Gaia House. With over 60 raised beds in the walled garden, two polytunnels and an effective composting system, we are able to provide a significant contribution to the delicious wholesome food served to our retreatants.

Food purchasing: We prioritise local suppliers for all the fresh food we buy in, and actively support local producers and tradespeople. Dried food and household supplies all come from the Essential Trading Co-operative in Bristol. They deliver all our requirements once a fortnight, when they are in the south Devon area.

Recycling and waste management: We have always been proactive in dealing with the waste generated here at Gaia House. A re-use & re-cycle system helps us reduce our carbon

footprint. We try to encourage our suppliers to minimise the packaging that goods are sent in.

Building maintenance: All paints (emulsion & gloss) used inside the house are water based. The Meditation Hall was recently painted using Earthborn eco paints.

Travel: Use of land-based public transport, car and taxi sharing, as well as arriving by bike are all encouraged to help reduce the carbon footprint of Gaia House's activities.'

over in Buddhism's native lands, the customs and practices of its people were either disregarded as corrupted forms of the religion, or actively suppressed.

So at first the fit of this transmission was problematic: in terms of the idealist zeitgeist of the nineteenth century, renunciation and nirvana came across as pessimistic. Nevertheless, motivated perhaps by the Romantic belief in the nobility of antiquity, and through some selective interpretations, a fit did come around – in accord with the humanist ideals of the age. Around the middle of the century the Transcendentalists found in the Mahayana sutras the inspiring image of a Buddha and Bodhisattvas committed to the salvation of all beings; and, across the Atlantic, Sir Edwin Arnold, in his *The Light of Asia* (1879), portrayed the Buddha's teaching as a universalist path towards a Transcendental One. Then the Buddhist speakers and models showed up.

The World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 set the stage on which Buddhist delegates could present the Dhamma. They did so in a way that they thought would best suit Western culture and its current sensitivities. Accordingly, the Sri Lankan Dharmapāla and the Japanese Sōen Shaku spoke of a Buddhism that embraced

evolutionary theory and eschewed ritual and the miraculous in favour of reasoned inquiry. Sōen equated Dharmakāya with the Godhead, and, in a move that used both Romantic-Transcendentalist imagery and their pantheistic deity, asserted that:

Buddhists do not think that God has any special abode ... sits in his august throne surrounded by angels ... If we want to see him face to face, we are able to find him in the lilies of the field, in the fowls of the air and in the murmuring mountain stream.³

For his part, Dharmapāla chose to emphasize scientific rationalism. In his paper, 'The World's Debt to Buddha', he states:

Buddhism is a scientific religion, in as much as it earnestly enjoins that nothing whatever be accepted on faith. Buddha has said that nothing should be believed merely because it is said. Buddhism is tantamount to a knowledge of other sciences.⁴

His approach, derived from his education in British schools in Sri Lanka, was further shaped by his association with Henry Steel Olcott. Olcott was a leading light in the Theosophical movement, which used an evolutionary model to explicate an ongoing spiritual process wherein a lineage of occult masters gave the light of their wisdom to humanity. Olcott saw Gotama Buddha as one of these. Furthermore, in his popular *Buddhist Catechism* (1881), he explained the supernormal features of the Buddha in terms of science – Theosophical science, that is. Dharmapāla then picked up that approach and proclaimed the Buddha's 'Arya Dhamma' as a timeless and universal wisdom, free from rituals and congruent with modern science. (Also see: 3.3 'Grass Roots and New Roots'.)

Two more people helped to shape the Buddhism that the general public would come across in the early twentieth century: D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966), who served as Sōen Shaku's translator at the World's Parliament and who became the foremost exponent of Zen Buddhism in the West; and Paul Carus (1852-1919) whom he met there while Carus was undergoing a spiritual crisis occasioned by doubts about

Christianity. Suzuki sustained the Romantic-Transcendentalist connection in his prolific presentations of Zen: *'Man came out of nature in order to see nature in himself; that is, nature came to itself to see itself in Man.'*⁵ In similarly Romantic fashion, Zen masters were typified as unlettered sages of spontaneous realizations who defied social, even Buddhist, conventions.

Westerners might not have the knowledge that the Zen masters in Suzuki's books were figures who may have lived in China 1,000 and more years previously, and who had undergone decades of training. And that contemporary Zen training is highly structured in terms of discipline and routine, with the roshi prescribing a program of traditional koan practice for each student to be examined in. Zen monasteries certainly had cultivated land and carefully tended gardens, but this owed more to feeding the monks and to classical Japanese aesthetics than to seeing nature in oneself.

For Carus, a follower of Spinoza, the teachings of mainstream Christianity couldn't be sustained in the light of modern scientific understanding. *'Religion must be in perfect accord with science ... Science is divine and the truth of science is a revelation of God.'*⁶ In search of a religion that would bridge the gap he perceived as yawning in Christianity, he listened to the Buddhists and concluded that of all the existing religions, Buddhism was the one that came closest to his ideal 'Religion of Science'. He subsequently (1894) went on to produce *The Gospel of Buddhism* (which Suzuki translated into Japanese, and Dharmapāla promoted in Sri Lanka), a digest of selected passages that were placed beside selected Christian ones to indicate the universality of religious truth. To align these religions with science, he further interpreted their more cosmological and supernatural features to be metaphorical or otherwise symbolic.

Thus, as Buddhism came west (and bounced back east), its most outspoken proponents abandoned many of its specific terms and much of its cosmology in favour of the world-order of either scientific rationalism, Romantic pantheism or universal spirituality.

So for the Theosophists, Buddhism was one aspect of a universal spiritual truth to be approached through mysticism: the Buddha was configured amongst a hierarchy of masters, some living in the Himalayas, others on the astral plane.* For others, it was a scientific approach, empirically verifiable, and 'Protestant' in that it spoke of freedom from the Church, or from any dogma. For them, the validity of Buddhism was in how it offered understanding in this world, not on some psychic plane. The two approaches seemingly had not much common ground. This began to surface through the inclinations of contemporary culture, as well as on account of its social problems.

The culture of the USA carried the myths and inspiration of the Romantics and Transcendentalists. Thus a 'back to the earth' approach, drawing inspiration from Suzuki's Zen, led seekers out of the reach of the Church, the library or the academy and into the validity of individual expression. Hence, in the 1950s on the West Coast, 'Romantic' Buddhism took an American form within the literary movement called the 'Beats' (short for 'Beatific'). The Beat movement was diverse, but several of its key figures – Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen – adopted a Buddhism that married aspects of Zen and Mahayana idealism to elements of late Romantic culture, and endorsed the supremacy of spontaneous and unconventional behaviour.

Exemplifying such themes, Kerouac's loosely biographical *Dharma Bums* depicts him riding railcars and hitchhiking across America as '*an oldtime bhikku [sic] in modern clothes wandering in the world ... in order to turn the wheel of the True Meaning, or Dharma, and gain merit for myself as a future Buddha (Awakener) and as a future Hero in Paradise*'.⁷ This vision of Dhamma, drawing on his Catholic background, crystallizes in his *Scripture of the Golden Eternity* (1960) into the mythic 'golden eternity'. As in:

*Thus the London-based Buddhist Society started out as the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

The awakened Buddha to show the way, the chosen Messiah to die in the degradation of sentience, is the golden eternity. One that is what is, the golden eternity, or, God, or, Tathagata – the *name*. The Named One. The human God. Sentient Godhood. Animate Divine. The Deified One. The Verified One. The Free One. The Liberator. The Still One. The settled One. The Established One. Golden Eternity. All is Well. The Empty One. The Ready One. The Quitter. The Sitter. The Justified One. The Happy One.

and

You are the golden eternity because there is no me and no you, only one golden eternity.⁸

Kerouac died in 1969. Ginsberg went on to embrace aspects of Vajrayana, specifically as taught by the ‘crazy wisdom’ master Chōgyam Trungpa, while Snyder, the backwoodsman of the group, deepened his path through the study and attempted integration of Zen practice and environmental concern with Native American culture. What these writers, seminal figures for the post-war mindset, had in common was the establishment of a locus of meaning, something that wedded aspects of Buddhism to mythic roots: Catholic in Kerouac’s case, Native American with Snyder and Jewish with Ginsberg.

Snyder had a prior interest in ecology and Asian culture. He committed to training in a Zen monastery in Japan during 1955-58, and followed that up by spending periods of time in Japan throughout the next decade. His literary work and Zen practice were also increasingly tempered by immersion in the pre-industrial cultures in America and Australia, and he became a popular spokesman for ecological integrity. Snyder’s contribution to the Dhamma was to frame it as a spiritual culture in which community life, respect for the environment, and living close to the earth blend with more contemplative aspects. He has written many articles and poems on these themes, drawing inspiration from Native American culture. As

for example in his 1969 ‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’, wherein he uses a Native American icon to typify Mahāyāna sentiments and address the contemporary landscape. Here is an extract:

Once in the Jurassic about 150 million years ago, the Great Sun Buddha in this corner of the Infinite Void gave a Discourse to all the assembled elements and energies: to the standing beings, the walking beings, the flying beings, and the sitting beings — even grasses, to the number of thirteen billion, each one born from a seed, assembled there: a Discourse concerning Enlightenment on the planet Earth.

“In some future time, there will be a continent called America. It will have great centers of power called such as Pyramid Lake, Walden Pond, Mt. Rainier, Big Sur, Everglades, and so forth; and powerful nerves and channels such as Columbia River, Mississippi River, and Grand Canyon. The human race in that era will get into troubles all over its head, and practically wreck everything in spite of its own strong intelligent Buddha-Nature.

“The twisting strata of the great mountains and the pulsings of volcanoes are my love burning deep in the earth. My obstinate compassion is schist and basalt and granite, to be mountains, to bring down the rain. In that future American Era I shall enter a new form; to cure the world of loveless knowledge that seeks with blind hunger: and mindless rage eating food that will not fill it.”

And he showed himself in his true form of

SMOKEY THE BEAR

A handsome smokey-colored brown bear standing on his hind legs, showing that he is aroused and watchful.

Bearing in his right paw the Shovel that digs to the truth beneath appearances; cuts the roots of useless attachments, and flings damp sand on the fires of greed and war;

His left paw in the Mudra of Comradely Display — indicating that all creatures have the full right to live to their limits and that deer, rabbits, chipmunks, snakes, dandelions, and lizards all grow in the realm of the Dharma;

Wearing the blue work overalls symbolic of slaves and laborers, the countless men oppressed by a civilization that claims to save but often destroys;

Wearing the broad-brimmed hat of the West, symbolic of the forces that guard the Wilderness, which is the Natural State of the Dharma and the True Path of man on earth: all true paths lead through mountains—⁹

In this text, Snyder's approach is straightforward and transparent: to create a Buddhist myth that conveys a message to counteract greed, hatred and delusion. It is an unabashedly mythic statement, complete with a legendary time, sacred locations, and hero with a mission. And it does what culture is supposed to do: to popularize a teaching by means of appealing images. This is the case in traditional Buddhism where fables (such as the creation myth of the *Agañña Sutta* [D.27]) or animal personae (cf. the *Jātaka* stories) are employed to bring across the ethical thrust of Dhamma in a popular way.

IMAGINATIVE INSPIRATION AND RATIONAL ORDER

A mythic and ecological alignment to the Earth was essential because as the twentieth century proceeded, Westerners came to feel disconnected not only from a benevolently ordered cosmos, but from the world of other creatures (other than their domestic facsimiles), and even from each other. As cars took over the streets, as superstores replaced the markets, and as communal workshops were replaced by anonymous factories, the average post-1960s person had very little deep interaction with their fellows. (By the beginning of the next century, most interaction would be via a screen on a device.) Human beings had begun to be governed by machines and systems that were far removed from empathy or compassion.

In such an environment, Buddhist seeds offering non-violence, tolerance and inner peace were welcome. But finding peace within was only part of the picture: for the social bonding that is essential to

human beings a new world-order was needed. In the sixties, the urge to 'drop out', to radically disengage from the mainstream of Western society and form a counter-culture, was picked up by the younger generation. But it needed socially responsible glue at least as much as mystic revelation.

Events continued to prepare the ground. In another crisis for Western values, the torch of democracy was used to kindle the Vietnam War, and that brought forth more popular dissent. So the Peace movement came to the fore – for which Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen master, became a Buddhist spokesman. His war-torn background, gentle demeanour, and an approach that strongly emphasized compassion – directed at perpetrator and victim alike – made him a key inspirational figure. As he hailed from a Mahayana Zen/Ch'an tradition, it was doctrinally easy for him to bring the Huayan concept of Inter-being to the West; and in 1966, he founded an Order with that name. Subsequently exiled from Vietnam, he established the Plum Village community in France where he currently lives. Exile also brought the Tibetans west, likewise preaching compassion and headed by the accessible and popular H.H. the Dalai Lama. Inspired by such examples and motivated by the sense that Dhamma was about compassionate engagement, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship was founded in 1978 by Robert Aitken Roshi and presented a pan-Buddhist front including the Vietnamese Thich Nhat Hanh, the Thai Sulak Sivaraksa, and the Americans Gary Snyder and Joanna Macy. Thus 'engaged Buddhism' (to distinguish it from reclusive or academic practices) grew to include taking the natural world under its wing.

Joanna Macy first encountered Buddhism in 1965 while working with Tibetan refugees in India, but as a student and scholar her foundation was in Theravada, the Buddhism of Sri Lanka and the Pali texts. Her participation in the fieldwork of Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka offered her the example of engaged Buddhism. The learning

was down-to-earth: the sight of some diagrams of the causes and consequences of craving on a village wall stimulated her to review the teaching on the Dependent Arising of suffering (*paticca-samuppada*). On detailed reflection she then coupled Dependent Arising with systems theory to arrive at an 'eco-Buddhist' world-view.* For this she presented *paticcasamuppāda* not as a weave of the interconnections that arise dependent on ignorance and craving, but as a principle of 'the radical interdependence of all phenomena'.¹⁰ In another shift from the perspective of the early suttas, this state of interconnection is to be encouraged, rather than constituting a description of what one needs to be released from. This was a distinct change of meaning from that of the Buddhist tradition and its venerated texts.

Buddhism had entered the USA via the Pacific with the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans; in Europe it came with immigration from the Buddhist Asian colonies. Asian monastics began presenting teachings, at first largely to their ethnic communities, but over time to a widespread field of interest in the multi-cultural cities in which they were based. And they brought not just verbal teachings, but behaviours, ritual – and a challenge to Western attitudes. The meeting of the cultures has been both rich and in a sense mutually disorienting – with the Asian monastics attempting to adapt to Western culture, and the Westerners struggling to settle into Asian rituals and observances or assuming that these carried mystic power. An already multi-cultural package has had to expand to include the Western environment and share a widely divergent field. By and large, the result has been a favourable understanding – that culture is a useful convention for embedding values, but these values have to be based on ethics and supported by inquiry.

*In this respect, she was preceded by the Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Naess (1912-2009) who arrived at his view of dependent origination and systems theory through studying Spinoza and Mahayana Buddhism.

Another development is the ‘Vipassana’ movement. In the 1970s seekers from the East Coast of America such as Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg and Jack Kornfield made their way to Burma to learn ‘*vipassanā*’ (‘insight’) meditation from local masters. Based on the meticulous Abhidhammic analysis of the mind, *vipassanā* was rational, employed scientific methods of observation and, most importantly, came in a systematic package that was exportable to a non-Buddhist, non-devotional West. In fact, as they brought it home to Puritan New England, they sidelined the ‘Buddhist’ nomenclature (risky in such a culture) along with the rituals and the chanting and focused purely on insight meditation as a method for weeding out greed, hatred and delusion.* Hence it was as the ‘Insight Meditation Society’ that a Buddhist meditation centre was founded in Massachusetts in 1975. The movement has developed considerably to many centres of similar disposition, such as Spirit Rock, New York Insight, etc. The Vipassana/Insight movement has consequently popularized mindfulness as a means of calmly observing the mind, and through just that, clearing negative mind-states and gaining inner balance. It is a method that is accessible to people from any mythic or religious background.

All this, however, doesn’t invalidate the need for myth, but allows for different configurations. The mythic element used by Snyder and subsequently by Macy gained popularity because the mythic sense is an aspect of human intelligence. It’s a foundation for culture; it gives us models and scenarios that get internalized as a basis for values. Culture isn’t based on reasoned truth: it uses flags, music, idealized statues and paintings to create icons of love, courage and wisdom; it’s mythic, a collective subjectivity. This subjectivity has to be carefully acknowledged, because subjective meanings can leak into objective measurements and use them to affirm our pre-existing attitudes.

*Another factor was that Westerners find the androcentric and hierarchical forms of Asian Buddhist culture to be a stumbling block. I have yet to find an Insight establishment that uses the word ‘Buddhist’ in its nomenclature.

Hence the wish for superiority can use the Theory of Evolution to ‘prove’ which beings are more advanced, better, intelligent and therefore worthy of respect. What has occurred in that deduction is that the exclusivity myth of man’s God-given dominion over the rest of Creation has crept in to add a value judgement. That is, as humans are the *pinnacle* of creation, they have the *right* to dominate it. With a further twist, smart intellects can apply that myth to the human domain to justify any supremacist ideology, from eugenics – the theory of genetic purity – to the myth of white superiority. And action proceeds from there.

For example, adopting the mood of Wagnerian Romanticism, one painting of Hitler portrays him as a sternly-focused knight in armour, preparing to drive out evil and thus save the West from its decadence.* This is in accord with warrior mythology, in which the hero doesn’t embrace the good so much as cut off evil. He is glorious and brutal. This warrior-hero is a common archetype in Western culture and is configured countless times in contemporary movies. He models the way to deal with opposing forces, aka ‘evil’. So when a supremacist myth acts as the basis for the moral superiority of my group, then whenever there is a real or inferred threat, a loss of security or the promise of personal gain, brutality towards ‘the others’ is justifiable. This bias permeates attitudes towards humans as well as other creatures, generates war, and devastates nations. It also leads to uprisings and counter-attacks: even the bugs mutate and come back stronger.

A wiser approach would recommend a regard that includes and works with ‘them’, and a scientific method to facilitate its translation into action. So, if we widen the view to valorize the cosmos as a whole, rather than adopt the mind-set that only one specific form

**Adolf Hitler als Ritter* by H.Lanzinger. Hitler arose against the backdrop of devastation caused by revenge-driven post-WWI reparations, and the financial Crash, but that he could direct this anger towards Jews was based on the long-standing Christian antipathy towards Jews, which itself is based on myth. Although Jesus was Jewish, the Gospel myth is that it was the Jews, not the Romans, who were responsible for the Crucifixion.

of rationality – attuned to machines and abstract facts and statistics – counts, we can observe data from a *range of viewpoints* to arrive at a deduction. Thus we can learn from and include other forms of intelligence. The approach is from an inclusive view, and the science is used *as a method, not as an ideology*.

Scientific observation can, for instance, show the marvellous intelligences of birds that can fly vast distances while orientated to a specific destination, as well as countless other forms of intelligence that leave ours far behind. The evolutionary principle can then become inclusive: that is, although humans have evolved, other life forms have too. So we're *all* at the pinnacle of our respective intelligent development. This development has been moulded not by a God-given right, but by environmental factors. A myth based on that understanding would acknowledge the gift of the many varied intelligences of the cosmos.

It's a similar case with the range of human intelligences, as shown through the work of biologist Jared Diamond. Diamond spent years working in such places as Papua New Guinea and learnt how finely attuned the local people were to reading life in the forest. From field work that demonstrated how environment shapes our intelligence, he began to deduce that the social and technological developments of Eurasia can be traced back to environmental factors: Eurasia offered a vast and accessible area of land occupying the same latitude and hence climate-zone; navigable rivers; the presence of animals that could be productively domesticated; and the predominance of cereal crops that were not found in other continents.⁶ Western Europe in particular had a high ratio of coastline-to-land mass, which made exploration and marauding easy, and hence encouraged the development of navies – through which means much of the planet was colonised. The apparent superiority of European culture is then based not on some racial trait or divine will, but on a dependent

process that is rooted in the Earth.¹¹ With this understanding, our duty then becomes one of expressing gratitude and respect, even to animals that we hunt (especially as evolving before us, they are

Trophic Cascade

A trophic cascade is the effect that occurs in an ecosystem when a significant ‘keystone’ animal is (re-)introduced into it. In accordance with interdependence, a beneficial effect ‘descends’ from the predator at the top of the food-chain down through the entire system in a way that seems at first unrelated to the introduced animal.

One well-studied example concerns the reintroduction of the grey wolf into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in 1995 after its extinction there in the 1930s. When the wolves disappeared, the population of the elk that had been their prey expanded, which resulted in an over-grazing of willow, aspen and cottonwood trees. As beavers feed on these, their numbers dropped – leaving only one beaver colony in the entire area of 3,472 sq. miles. The reduction of beavers meant less ponds, which in turn affected fish and the flooding and behaviour of rivers.

Since the wolves returned, the number of elk wasn’t reduced (in fact it increased), but the presence of wolves caused them to move away from the exposed open valleys into the woodland and to no longer linger to browse. This allowed for the willow and aspen to recover. So the beaver population increased to nine colonies at the present. With the beavers came ponds, and with the ponds, fish, otters and muskrats.

Trees recolonised the banks of the rivers, which stabilised them, and that meant less soil erosion. Trees brought birds and berries, and berries provided food for bears. The bears also benefitted from the carrion that the wolves left, as did bald eagles and ravens. As wolves also kill coyotes, the reduction in the coyote population meant that rabbits increased – and rabbits brought hawks, weasels and foxes. Thus an entire ecosystem came into balance and increased in its richness.

•••

Another instance concerns sea otters, who reappeared in the Elkhorn Slough estuary of Monterey, California after a ban on hunting them was introduced. This started another trophic cascade. The bay was suffering from algae contamination produced by the run-off of nitrates from agricultural land. Amongst other forms of life that it impacted, the algae killed the sea-grass which takes CO₂ out of the ocean (35 times faster than tropical rainforests from the atmosphere). The sea otters started dining on the crabs of the bay; and the reduction in the crab population occasioned an increase in the numbers of slugs that the crabs fed upon. These slugs inhabit sea-grass and feed on the accumulations of algae on its fronds. So through the introduction of otters, the sea-grass began to flourish and help to counter the damage to the oceans that affects us all.

our 'elders'). As with the myths and skills of the people of the land: inclusive responsibility replaces exclusive rights.

Inclusivity and dependency are also the hallmark of a hypothesis proposed by James Lovelock and Lynne Margulis in 1979.¹² Their scientific exploration presents data to conclude that the biosphere is self-regulative: that from bacteria to mammals, there is a 'web of life' that moderates the atmosphere and climate of the Earth to keep them in a steady balance for the organisms (including us) that depend on it. The theory then asserts that if we keep disrupting the web of life, then atmosphere and climate spin out of balance, and the existence of all living organisms is threatened: especially the more complex ones (including us) who can adapt less easily than micro-organisms. This hypothesis has never been disproved, and climate change is evidence of the effect of human ignorance with regard to this web of life. This understanding of interdependence and climate change was presented to the US Congress in 1988 by NASA scientist James Hansen; they didn't act on his findings, but subsequently they have been accepted by the scientific community in general.

Fittingly enough though, what made the theory popularly accessible is the name that Lovelock's friend, the novelist William Golding, gave it: the 'Gaia' hypothesis, so-named after the ancient Greek goddess of the Earth. For contemporary eco-Buddhists this was a gift; and Joanna Macy's work has subsequently developed ritual to align the heart to the Earth as Great Mother. The Mother-Goddess, with inclusive womb and nourishing breasts, is one of the most deeply embedded images in the cultural psyche. She is a mythic entity who offers peace and inclusivity and thereby acts as a counter to the warrior-hero. So for a humanity hungry for a harmonious and compassionate world-order, 'eco-Buddhism' provides a mythic and responsible foundation for a practice that brings the internal

world of the psyche with the external world of the biosphere into a unifying focus.

The Mother-Goddess also resonated within the feminist movement, which includes many Dhamma practitioners. This sets up an occasionally confrontational relationship with a Buddhist tradition whose chief protagonists and authorities are (or were) male. Attempts to reconfigure the tradition in order to shift its androcentric basis are consequently another aspect of Western Buddhism, and this inevitably has to include the mythic aspect of the psyche. Even in Insight centres: a leading centre in Britain is called Gaia House; female images, such as those of Tara, Kwan Yin or Prajnaparamita, all from the Mahayana mythology, appear on Vipassana shrines. Often seated at the front of meditation halls or in alcoves, where they receive no offerings and aren't addressed or invoked through chanting, these images haven't as yet been fully empowered. But an alternative world-order based on careful attention, inclusivity and compassion has begun to select its mythic images. Perhaps as well as Gaia, a brown bear and a Bodhisattva or two, a few Buddhist *Jātakas* and guardian celestial kings will one day be welcome. These could introduce the multi-layered cosmos of *devas* and *brahmas*, of *yakkhas*, *gandhabbas*, *preta* and Mara – with the great contemplatives winging through the cosmos, without bulging muscles or leotards but offering protection and blessings. Why not widen the view, include it all and see what works?



A Growing Synthesis

WE MAY THINK OF THE SENSING BODY AS A KIND OF OPEN CIRCUIT THAT COMPLETES ITSELF ONLY IN THINGS, AND IN THE WORLD. THE DIFFERENTIATION OF MY SENSES, AS WELL AS THEIR SPONTANEOUS CONVERGENCE IN THE WORLD AT LARGE, ENSURES THAT I AM A BEING DESTINED FOR RELATIONSHIP: IT IS PRIMARILY THROUGH MY ENGAGEMENT WITH WHAT IS *NOT* ME THAT I EFFECT THE INTEGRATION OF MY SENSES, AND THEREBY EXPERIENCE MY OWN UNITY AND COHERENCE.¹³

DAVID ABRAM

MY EXISTENCE IS RELATIONAL

The supremacy that has been afforded to rationality empowers the ‘conceiving’ of experience to form objects I hold myself to be separate from. Unchecked, this objectification generates a plethora of ‘-isms’ that then provide viewpoints through which we can relate to or study the world ‘out there’. In this respect, mechanism sees phenomena from its viewpoint in terms of their ability to arrive at desired results consistently and independently of any environmental factor. Theism offers the same supremacy to a Deity: our role is to follow the Divine Will it teaches, and to impose its view and behaviour on others. Like Frankenstein’s Creature, any of these ideologies can lurch out of control – until beaten down by another Creature. As the

supremacist horrors of the twentieth century made clear. This is how objectifying plays out: if our conceiving isn't bridled with ethics and compassion, it reduces the cosmos to the flat terrain of paper, screen and thought, and distances us from full living participation. With *papañca*, we don't even meet and handle our own internal cosmos; instead we keep pushing thoughts, emotions and instincts towards becoming some ideal object called a 'person'. Yet we can never become some ideal object because the basis of experience is not an object – it's subjective and relational.

I'm writing this piece in Tisarana monastery in Canada; it is winter. From time to time, I take a break and walk across the snow-covered land that sweeps away from the main buildings. The effect is immediate: it's not just that of the cool, fresh air and the widened visual perspective. There is a shift of awareness to a receptive mode; my mind is quiet and my body as it moves through the deep snow is attentive to the textures of the land, instinctively gauging the firmness or evenness of the terrain underfoot. My arms seem more alive, ready to support me if I slip. My sense of hearing is keen, my eyes in a very different state from when I was typing: they are alert, but have no fixed object. In general, I feel I'm located in something receptive and dynamic. This location is inhabited by many impressions: now by the cool brush of air, now by the crunch and the soft resistance of the snow beneath my boots, now by the tracery of the fine branches of the trees. There are few thoughts; instead a mood of quiet fullness illuminates my location, echoing the sky. All these textures interweave. A few minutes previously, my location had been in a world of thought that I was pushing along; now it is travelling with me through unpredictable territory.

At the edge of a rise, I turn my head and catch sight of two dark shapes about 35 metres away in the valley of a small stream; my pause is immediate and instinctive: deer. They look up and their ears swivel; one moves into the trees, the other scans around and then

dips her head into the stream. My awareness is held on the deer; my body anchors itself as if I were crouching over the water; everything in me seems to be listening, to the extent that any self-consciousness has dissolved into a sense of shared presence. Then I notice, at one edge of the visual field, another dark shape: a human, a man. I don't want him to disturb the deer, want her to be allowed to drink without fear – but he also is moving quietly, and as he draws near, I recognize David, a member of the monastic community. We quietly exchange a few words about the deer and watch together. Eventually she has had her fill and moves off.

In themselves, these events are nothing that special, and they pass. What stays with me is the sense that my location isn't a geographical 'fact', but a shared and contingent domain. It moves with me and is part of my overall sense of being. Later in the day, when I sit in meditation, that domain is one of bodily sensations, casual inclinations and focused intentions. Through establishing the intention to not follow the thoughts or fidget, but to mindfully feel their impact in an open and non-reactive way, my experienced reality changes: the body is now less a matter of flesh and sensations, and more one of a gathered energy – attentive, firm, but soft-edged. There is a sense of quiet fullness. Although I might *call* the centre of that location 'me', that particular item doesn't actually occur: it's an inference.

This inference arises because this *sense* of having a location seems constant; therefore it would be reasonable to assume that I'm an entity 'in here' – within a world 'out there'. Surely. Yet, as I meditate, if I focus on that inference, I note that it arises dependent on drives to be something, to do something or to experience something that isn't happening right now. And none of these are actually necessary in my current existence. Acknowledging that, and relinquishing the aims of those inclinations, I also realize that they can subside. The result: a deepening, a firming up and a sense of peace – I don't need to keep

producing a world with 'me' in it; things feel better without following that objectifying instinct.

I would say that this kind of experience is not unusual among Buddhist meditators. In meditation, the edges of the location and the sense of centre can become so tenuous as to be indeterminate – yet firmness, clarity and ease become stronger dependent on one's ability to sustain mindful non-involvement. Attention gets steadier and clearer even as the mental content shifts and fades. There are times when what one is aware of gets flooded or stormy. But overall the meditator grows dispassionate towards his or her 'climate': this too isn't 'me' or 'mine'. And because of that dispassion, one feels more agile, ready to participate without self-consciousness or ambition, more capable of cooperation. The relational sense is enhanced, clean and available.

If I could rewrite the preceding notes with greater accuracy, I would also remove the word 'I' that heads the verbs; however, the conventions of the English language don't allow that to occur in a way that flows easily. And experience does flow; it is an ongoing weave of relational qualia – sensations, sights, recognitions, focuses, inclinations: *dhammā*. Of these *dhammā*, the 'I' inference adds aim, judgement, and a sense of acquisition: 'What do I get out of this?' 'How good do I seem in this?' But these just clog the weave. The less the 'I' attitude imposes itself, the more the weave unbinds or reveals subtler senses and realizations. This is meditation as process: it allows the compulsive or stressful items to drop away, and to re-arise with increasingly less frequency over time. A cool understanding replaces blind assumptions.

With experience I also realize that of all scenarios that support the development of receptivity and attitudinal agility, and that remove heedlessness, indifference and despond, the presence of other living beings is the best. It's the random and responsive quality of the field of life that sharpens awareness; and the greater the diversity, the more

dynamic the input, and the fuller and subtler the response. You can feel wordless resonances in your heart, a brightening in the skin and energy running through the muscles. In the holistic synesthesia of all this, moods in the mind, the swivelling ears of deer or the flight of finches, and the experience of one's body navigating and negotiating with the land and the weather all arise as an unbroken field, or 'cosmos'. Meanwhile, the level of pre-occupation, plans and anxieties plummets. 'Oneness with Nature'? Something like it – except that the awareness itself isn't confined to the material data, nor synonymous with the subtle emotional shifts or inclinations. While being present with all this, it is not locatable in space or time.

Could the desk offer the same responsive foundation? Interacting with emails or web browsing, with the computer that one works at operating at the touch of the fingers? No: nothing sees, is interested in or threatens your bodily presence among these. The desk-bound life is void of other life forms – it only responds to your thoughts. Your body, with its energies and subtle sentience, is largely irrelevant. At the end of the day, you may have succeeded at your task but you are not filled in the same way as you would be by a fifteen-minute stroll and a chance encounter with a wild deer.

Instead, when the action stops, one feels empty and in need: of something to eat, or read; or of something to buy – just for fun, or because of 'deserving' it. Although there might be an awareness of the insatiable nature of this appetite, without mindful dispassion, the mind doesn't have the strength to go against its power, or to fill the emptiness that supports it. This emptiness arises because one important item in one's ongoing location has gone missing: the sensate body. That sense is what a location that includes other living beings in the random and unrepeatable process of the wilds wakes up.

Take another scenario: if I sat with David on a train journey, we might talk about what or who we're involved with, or about our personal concerns; we would exchange narratives of the human kind.

Satoyama

'Satoyama' – the term is derived from the Japanese words for village (*sato*) and mountain (*yama*) – is a place where nature and people exist in harmony. In Japan, the resulting mosaic-like land-use system often includes: growing rice in paddies and crops in fields; regular logging of woodlands to obtain firewood and make charcoal; and the gathering of animal feed, fertilizers and thatch from grasslands.

It is an example of an agricultural model that has sustained millions of people for thousands of years. However, over the last century Japan has industrialised and urbanised, and the changes that these developments have brought with them have undermined and sometimes led to the abandonment of more traditional ecosystem management systems through which people could sustainably derive their food, water and shelter. As a response to this, the satoyama system has received attention and revival. As of 2001, there are more than 500 environmental groups in Japan that work for the conservation of satoyama and its method has become more prevalent in Japanese landscapes.

In recognition of the potential of this socio-ecological production system, the Satoyama Initiative was established at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2009 as a global effort to realize 'societies in harmony with nature' through the recognition and

promotion of satoyama landscapes and similar landscapes around the world. In 2010, the Satoyama Initiative was recognized in Decision X/32 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP CBD) as a 'potentially useful tool to better understand and support human-influenced natural environments for the benefit of biodiversity and human well-being'. The International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative was also launched at the same CBD meeting. Key components of the Initiative will be the synthesising of wisdom on the sustainable use, reuse and recycling of natural resources; the integration of traditional ecological knowledge with modern science; and the creation of a new commons, i.e. introducing or stabilising cooperative management of land and natural resources.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), known informally as the Biodiversity Convention, is a multilateral treaty. The Convention has three main goals including: the conservation of biological diversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. As of 2016, the Convention has 196 parties, which includes 195 states and the European Union. All UN member states – with the exception of the United States – have ratified the treaty. Non-UN member states that have ratified are the Cook Islands, Niue, and the State of Palestine.

Other people on the train would be doing much the same, perhaps via their smartphones, or using those devices to plug into some music. No-one is going to chirp and flutter out of the window, or pause and sniff the wind; no untamed creature will come snuffling down the aisle, and the climate in the train will remain stable and neutral. If other creatures are allowed in, they are domesticated, humanized, and non-intrusive. A domain created by humans doesn't ask us to open and balance in silent, shared presence; accordingly, we can move through this domain thinking of something else, in a location that moves on, not in the unbinding of meditative attention, but through a clutter of inconclusive thoughts, projections and memories. It's a monoculture.

Of course, if I wish to engage in something, human civilization provides many wonderful options – I could go to an art gallery and admire how Monet or Turner has conjured up a three-dimensional scene out of dabs of paint on a canvas; an evening at a concert could flood me with moods and emotions – but the interaction would be minimal; and none of it as unbidden as what unfolds and includes me on a morning's walk in the hills.

As I am one human being among many, I imagine that what is most basic for me is relevant to all of us: I can't finally identify with being any specific thing or fixed quality. But I have needs that can only be met by having qualities awakened and drawn out of me. Certainly I need food and shelter and air to breathe, but I cannot be satisfied by input alone, nor by what I do. It's in the interplay, the receiving, responding and participating with living systems (including those of other people) as they arise that I feel complete – and at the same time empty of self-definition.

Perhaps the simple truth is that having been born on this planet and brought alive by what it provides, I am more authentic and balanced when I am in touch with its life. And when I align my awareness to that balance, a peaceful centre is revealed, and clinging

to this and that and the ideas of past and future drops away. Just so. Maybe, like the Buddha, we all need to touch, and be touched by, the Earth.

EMBODIED MIND

In meditation practice, by letting simple bodily presence (often refined to the rhythmic sensations of breathing) affect the mind, mindfulness of body reveals an innate sympathy between body as an intelligent sensing system and the mind. Mindfulness also educates us in terms of relationship: attempts to control, to ‘make it work’, along with any half-heartedness, will not bring good results. We have to show up in the here and now and meet what arises. In this way, meditation also connects us to our individual piece of the biosphere. We realize that the mind is an aspect of the environment.

This ‘environmental’ understanding of mind was first suggested in a Western context by William James (1842-1910), the forefather of ‘empirical psychology’ – the study of consciousness in terms of what happens. He presented consciousness as a ‘stream’ rather than as a fixed entity or a series of events; a stream that can’t be held down and observed objectively because the experience of being observed will itself affect the stream. James also proposed that emotions originate in the body in its response to the sensed world. Using the instance of a person running from a bear, he suggested that it was the change in heart-rate and the contracting of certain muscles in defence schemas that generated fear, rather than that the emotion caused these bodily reactions. In other words, that there is no mind separate from experience.

So we cannot step back and observe all experience – attention and stepping back *as well as the sense of someone who’s doing it*, are *part* of experience. And as meditation exemplifies, qualities such as mindfulness, dispassion and a trust in letting go have effects. In summary, there is no observer, only participation. This is a

maxim in quantum theory, the theme of the biosphere and the crux of any skilful human relationship. In brief, participation is the law of the cosmos. and it asks us to open beyond the position of the observing self.

The proposal that the basic human state is non-separate from its perceived environment was followed up on by philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. They used phrases such as *Lebenswelt* (life-world) and *Dasein* ('Being-there') to define the location of the individual. As contemporary philosopher David Abram explains:

The life-world is the world that we count on without necessarily paying it much attention, the world of the clouds overhead and the ground underfoot, of getting out of bed and preparing food and turning on the tap for water ... It is not a private, but a collective, dimension – the common field of our lives and the other lives with which ours are entwined – and yet it is profoundly ambiguous and indeterminate, since our experience of this field is always relative to our situation within it ... All of our concepts and representations, scientific and otherwise, necessarily draw nourishment from this indeterminate air, as the physicist analyzing data is still nourished by the air that she is breathing, by the feel of the chair that supports her and the light flooding in through the window, without her being particularly conscious of these participations.

The life-world is thus peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake. Yet whenever we attempt to *explain* this world conceptually, we seem to forget our active participation within it. Striving to represent the world, we inevitably forfeit its direct presence.¹⁴

In terms of this presentation, the sensate body acts as a medium between the material 'external' and the immaterial 'internal' aspects of each individual's environment. This philosophical proposal has received scientific validation in the emerging field of neuroscience. In this area, it was the Chilean biologist Francisco Varela (1946 –

2001) who first coined the term ‘embodied mind’ to convey the co-dependency of mental phenomena and the physical nervous system. The investigation continues: Varela went on to co-found the Mind and Life Institute in 1987 as a way of hosting a series of dialogues between scientists and the Dalai Lama on the relationship between modern science and Buddhism.¹⁵

Significantly, the approach applied a scientific deductive and objective method to what had been subjective ‘religious’ experience. As mentioned before, the scientific method is that given *this* datum and when performing *this* test on it in a range of circumstances involving different observers, what are the consistent results? So a neuroscientist could now measure the brain waves and nervous responses of meditators; they could witness areas of the cortex glow with compassion.

Of course, the fields of science and subjective experience are separate: one may measure the effect of happiness, but still not capture the experience. So perhaps the most useful result was that, just as the split between science and religion had been the forerunner of the ethically disengaged developments of the seventeenth century, the twentieth century witnessed a movement towards unifying human understanding, towards integrating the subjective and objective domains. The hope is that rather than merely (and uselessly) oppose science with traditional views, religion itself could test its understanding and be part of a constructive dialogue. Neuroscientific views of the body-mind relationship are that either consciousness is an epiphenomenon of the brain (i.e. we are meat that is evolving intelligence), or that the brain has evolved through the feedback of consciousness with materiality (i.e. we’re an intelligence that has shaped meat). In either case, there’s a co-dependency. But whatever position one adopts, the Buddhist view is that the embodied intelligence should be directed to immediate human well-being. And

in this respect psychotherapy continued to offer its solutions, based on the participation of the psychotherapist.

The two leaders in the field of psychoanalysis, Freud and Jung, had scrutinized the inner aspects of the cosmos and revealed a domain peopled with egos, shadows, sub-personalities and repressed drives, a redress of the old spirits, demons and defilements. Jung later envisioned those, along with their more positive compatriots, as belonging to 'the collective unconscious' at the roots of religion, culture and myth:

There is a thinking in primordial images, in symbols which are older than the historical man, which are inborn in him from the earliest times, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche. It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them.¹⁶

Thus the subjective mythic realm returned from the supernatural and the literary in a way that was presented scientifically. The findings were also transformative. Firstly, the notion of mind was broadened to include what we might call 'heart' and 'soul' as aspects of 'psyche'.^{*} These non-rational systems were understood to be the foundation of what defines and directs us. Further, that although the content may confound our personality, we can each directly, subjectively bear witness to it. Lastly, a relational twist was added: that the content of our psyche is attributable to the results of previous actions and events (*vipaka-kamma*), generated through other people, and, at a deep level, shared with other people. Simply speaking, we are motivated by our images and myths, good or bad: wolves are evil, dark-skinned people are savages, people in uniforms are responsible, etc.

^{*}From a scientific point of view, the fact that psyche replicates *citta*, even though none of its proponents was familiar with the Buddhist understanding of mind, is satisfactorily impartial.

In this new analysis, the psyche was revealed as the source of the witch-hunts that had 200,000 women executed between 1500 and 1800; as well as of the gallant knights, the ever-loving mothers and the wise kings that we could never quite become. To understand this psyche and its potent material thus becomes the responsibility of the individual to society – that of keeping their own inner house in order. But the main transformation in terms of setting the mind straight was the presence of another responsive and trustworthy human being, the therapist, who would engage with the client’s psyche in dialogue. This is the relational twist: that we can know and develop ourselves better through the impartial presence of another than either through our own reasoning or through academic study.

The understanding of the benefits of skilful relationship has spread beyond pure clinical need to include counselling, coaching and shared dialogue as a common feature of modern life.

Take the case of Julia ‘Butterfly’ Hill, who spent two years living high up in a redwood tree in California in order to protect it from being cut down by Pacific Lumber Company. In an interview in *Inquiring Mind*, she comments:

When I climbed up in that tree I was new to activism, but I soon realized that we had become so good at defining what we were against that what we were against was beginning to define us. I saw the problem in meetings where activists were “clear-cutting” each other with their words and their anger. As people were talking, I could literally hear the chainsaws in their words, cutting each other apart ...

That’s when I went deeper and realized I had climbed up in the tree not because I was angry at corporations and governments—although I was angry at them—but because I loved the forest and I loved the planet and I loved this sacred life that we’re all a part of. And so I began to approach all the issues from that place of love.

What really moved me was that some Pacific Lumber employees put their metal shop to work building what are basically metal bandages to hold the tree's cuts together while the wounds heal. I talked to some of these Pacific Lumber workers, and they said, "Julia, we didn't necessarily agree with what you did, but you were always respectful, you never called us names, and you came to a respectful agreement with the company. Whoever attacked this tree does not represent all of us."¹⁷

Healing and dialogue have begun to replace the rapier of debate and the sword of someone's idea of justice.



How Wild is Sanity?

THE LAND ETHIC SIMPLY ENLARGES THE BOUNDARIES OF THE COMMUNITY TO INCLUDE SOILS, WATERS, PLANTS, AND ANIMALS, OR COLLECTIVELY: THE LAND. THIS SOUNDS SIMPLE: DO WE NOT ALREADY SING OUR LOVE FOR AND OBLIGATION TO THE LAND OF THE FREE AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE? YES, BUT JUST WHAT AND WHOM DO WE LOVE? CERTAINLY NOT THE SOIL, WHICH WE ARE SENDING HELTER-SKELTER DOWN RIVER. CERTAINLY NOT THE WATERS, WHICH WE ASSUME HAVE NO FUNCTION EXCEPT TO TURN TURBINES, FLOAT BARGES, AND CARRY OFF SEWAGE. CERTAINLY NOT THE PLANTS, OF WHICH WE EXTERMINATE WHOLE COMMUNITIES WITHOUT BATTING AN EYE. CERTAINLY NOT THE ANIMALS, OF WHICH WE HAVE ALREADY EXTIRPATED MANY OF THE LARGEST AND MOST BEAUTIFUL SPECIES. A LAND ETHIC OF COURSE CANNOT PREVENT THE ALTERATION, MANAGEMENT, AND USE OF THESE 'RESOURCES,' BUT IT DOES AFFIRM THEIR RIGHT TO CONTINUED EXISTENCE, AND, AT LEAST IN SPOTS, THEIR CONTINUED EXISTENCE IN A NATURAL STATE. IN SHORT, A LAND ETHIC CHANGES THE ROLE OF *HOMO SAPIENS* FROM CONQUEROR OF THE LAND-COMMUNITY TO PLAIN MEMBER AND CITIZEN OF IT. IT IMPLIES RESPECT FOR HIS FELLOW-MEMBERS, AND ALSO RESPECT FOR THE COMMUNITY AS SUCH.¹⁸

ALDO LEOPOLD

REWILDING OUR LIVES

Let's look again into the biosphere. Or be seen by it; get a change of perspective. Maybe it could show us something about ourselves.

Something like that happened to Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), and it transformed him. Leopold was working for the US Forest Service, managing the land from the human perspective – which included hunting bears, wolves and mountain lions on whose account livestock were lost. Then one day, he shot a wolf, and looking into the eyes of the dying creature, experienced a shift in awareness:

... I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.¹⁹

A consequence of that shift was Leopold's development of a modern environmental ethic, an understanding based on considering the ecosystem as a whole. It began with the wilderness, which he no longer saw as a place set aside just for hunting and recreation, but as a reserve for the biotic community – wolves, elk, bears, trees and rivers – that would include humans, but not be directed exclusively from their perspectives. This was the beginning of what is called the 'wilderness movement'. It has led to 'rewilding' – the conscious removal of human influence from an area of land large enough to accommodate diverse forms of life, and the measured introduction of creatures to manage it according to natural laws. Currently this movement has resulted in the re-introduction of beavers into Britain; the survival of the European bison (down to 54 members in the 1950s, now roaming in Poland); the conservation of the Danube and the Oder deltas to the benefit of otter, beaver, salmon, sea trout, deer, wolves, wild boar, seals, and porpoises; and such projects as the Oostvaardersplassen, a 6,000 hectare polder about 20 miles/32 kms from Amsterdam that, having been set aside for forty years, has seen wildlife return that had disappeared in the Netherlands in the Middle Ages. Now the largest herd of wild horses in Europe thunders across these wetlands while huge white-tailed eagles soar overhead.

So how does that affect humans? Some of us might be more interested in rewilding than others, but what is of broad significance is that humans are putting effort into setting things straight in one area of their cosmos by granting it independence; by allowing it to be as it is and govern itself; by valuing it not as something that we can make use of, but just because it is alive. In the terms I'm using this means valuing collective subjectivity. So, rather than placing me and my interests at the centre of a world of others, this 'intersubjectivity' is a whole view that has ethical implications. As in Leopold's 'land ethic':

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.²⁰

On the other hand, when any individual member of the community or aspect of the cosmos becomes the sole focus and centre, then the effect is one of abuse:

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.²¹

Leopold also recognized that the custodianship of the land is best undertaken, not by the central government, but by the people living on it. So his recommendation was that the biotic community should include participating humans. This view is the heart of what right ethics, interdependence and 'life-world' are about. That is, if relationships with the land can inform interpersonal relationships, and relationships within society as a whole, this participatory and inclusive theme can steadily reduce actions based on exploitation, domination and self-view. It was a theme out of which Arne Naess developed 'deep ecology', an understanding that rejects the '*man-in-environment image*' in favour of viewing '*organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations*'.²²

Good News (a sample)

Waste-to-energy has become a preferred method of rubbish disposal in the EU, and there are now 420 plants in Europe equipped to provide heat and electricity to more than 20 million people. Germany ranks top in terms of importing rubbish, ahead of Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. Norway leads in terms of using waste to produce energy in district heat production, importing waste from the UK to do so.

...

Scientists have discovered and developed an enzyme that can 'eat' (i.e. break down) plastic. This means that, in theory anyway, disposed of plastic bottles can be recycled into new ones.

Meanwhile, Skipping Rocks Lab is making Ooho water pouches, 'bottles', out of seaweed: finish your drink, then eat the bottle.

...

The first ocean plastic-cleaning machine is due to be launched in July 2018. It is to be directed to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, an area more than twice the size of France situated between California and Hawaii that contains an estimated 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic. It is believed that it will collect some 40,000 tons (half the total trash) within five years. This includes the nets, ropes and debris that kills more than 100,000 whales, dolphins and seals each year. However, it won't pick up micro-plastic particles, the trillions of tiny particles that can penetrate the cell walls of the human body.

...

In 2016, China committed to a protection-oriented development for the Yangtze River. This prohibits heavy and chemical industries within one km of the river; new projects are not permitted and existing factories are to be relocated. The government has committed \$4.7 billion towards cleaning up the river. In his 19th Party Congress Address, President Xi Jinping commented that 'any harm on nature will return to haunt us.'

...

China is also aiming to triple its solar capacity by 2020 to 140 gigawatts (compare USA at 27.8 and Germany at 38.4). It is still the largest burner of coal in the world, but has been alarmed by the nearly unbreathable air in Shanghai and Beijing. In 2016, new solar capacity alone overtook net growth in coal usage, amongst a shift that saw renewables accounting for two-thirds of new power usage. It is calculated that enough solar energy lands on the planet's surface in an hour to power all human usage for one year.

...

A pan-African initiative to restore 100 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes by 2030 was launched in 2015. AFR100 partners have earmarked more than \$1 billion towards that end.

...

Indonesia has pledged up to \$1 billion a year to dramatically reduce the amount of plastic and other waste products polluting its waters. The announcement was made at the 2017 World Oceans Summit conference that

Indonesia would achieve a 70% reduction in marine waste within eight years. Measures could include using biodegradable materials such as cassava and seaweed to produce alternatives to plastic, a nationwide tax on plastic bags and a sustained public education campaign.

...

Niue, a tiny South Pacific island nation with a population of roughly 1,600, has turned 40% of its exclusive economic zone into a marine park. Since 2010, Chile has designated more than 400,000 square miles of marine parks where all extractive activities are prohibited. Mexico also recently designated 57,000 sq miles (150,000 sq kms) as an ocean reserve – the largest in North America. Meanwhile, the UK has established a huge marine reserve – some 322,000 sq miles (834,000 sq. kms) – around the Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific. Furthermore, the USA has created the Papahānaumokuākea Monument around the uninhabited Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and recently (2016) expanded it to more than 580,000 square miles. It is home to an estimated 7,000 marine and terrestrial

species, a quarter of which are found nowhere else on earth.

...

Chile has also designated some ten million acres of new national parkland. This was triggered by a donation of one million acres by Americans Kristine and Doug Tomkins of the ‘Patagonia’ outdoor clothing company.

...

At the UN Climate Summit in 2014, 159 endorsers – including countries, sub-national governments, companies and NGOs – committed to halving deforestation by 2020 and ending it by 2030. The ‘New York Declaration’ also includes a commitment to restoring hundreds of millions of hectares of forest land. A similar initiative, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, is aiming to restore 100 million hectares of forested land by 2030. In India in 2016, more than 800,000 volunteers planted 50 million trees in a day. It is estimated that planting forests, protecting peatlands and more skilful management of soil could account for 37% of the actions needed by 2030 to keep global temperatures down to a two-degree increase.

There are plenty of stories that illustrate that relational field. But to offer two: In 2008, I visited a turtle sanctuary in Sri Lanka. The man in charge had dedicated his life to the welfare of marine turtles. He and a few helpers would dig turtle eggs out of the sand on a nearby beach, hatch them in tanks and at a suitable time carry these young turtles down to the shore and set them free. This method ensured that a greater proportion of turtles would survive infancy. A few years prior to my visit, Sri Lanka had been hit by a tsunami: when the

tsunami hit, this man first grabbed a turtle under each arm before running to safety. People relate like that.

Then place that alongside another incident, and it's one of many, reported in Barry Lopez' *Of Wolves and Men*.²³ In Texas a few years ago, three men on horseback rode down a female wolf and threw a lasso over her head. The animal gripped the rope with her teeth to prevent being throttled; the men consequently dragged her round the prairie until her teeth broke. Then two of the men stretched the animal between two horses with ropes while the third beat her to death with fence pliers. People relate like that.

Whereas the first account is an example of empathy, of extending subjectivity towards another, the latter is an example of objectification; the removal of the subjective 'rightness' of another creature to be as it is, and its consequent violation. Consider the land, which is objectified as dirt, then intensively farmed or clear-cut so that it loses topsoil and becomes a desert; then notice how vegetation is objectified into timber, crops and weeds, with resultant soil exhaustion, eradication of insect life and loss of habitat; then consider animals – who become either a food supply, or a pet, or vermin; then humans – 'our' people and those 'other' ones. Subsequently our own bodies become objects, to be made into fashion icons, tattooed, or slashed in bouts of self-harming. Now we are entering the age of the cyborg and genetic engineering; human beings themselves may become manufactured to fit societal requirements. We can all then become objects, data processed by a machine.

When there is a decline in the relational field, where does that end? Will our grandchildren be so programmed by machine logic that they experience their elders as a non-functioning population? There will perhaps be 'too many' of us, anyway. Will we be as disposable as chickens who have passed their egg-laying capacities? Will we be informed that as resources are now limited and we have had sixty-five years of life on this planet, there is a prescription that

we can take that will allow us to meet our inevitable death within this year, free from pain, with dignity and in a clinically-approved environment? *'Just sign here. Or face the consequences.'* This, after all, would be a better deal than we gave to the wildlife of the planet – and to the people of the land for that matter. It would also be better than what on behalf of ideology, religion, political expediency or economic logic we continue to offer to the destitute people of this Earth. Whose numbers one day may well include us.

That depends on who 'us' will be, but with a population that is expected to exceed nine billion by the end of this century while the known planetary resources will have shrunk, 'us' and 'them' could be an intense topic. Renunciation, community and learning to live within limits will not just be a monastic option. Of course, all projected scenarios are subject to change, but whatever the future brings, such a scenario will require considerable skill and cooperation. And *that* will necessitate morality and sharing. If topsoil does continue to diminish, if air pollution does increase, if clean water does become scarce (let alone any other possibilities), then people will have to work together to share what is left. I mention these three disasters because even if we cancel fossil fuel tomorrow, or if we outlaw plastic bags and bottles and recycle our mountains of trash, we cannot bring back earth, water and air. Perhaps there could be a massive, coordinated clean-up; maybe we could develop other sources of food. We haven't done so well in terms of peaceful cooperation so far – but maybe, maybe. But it would require our science and technology to be directed by tremendous collective resolve – and a cultivation of generosity, ethical integrity and restraint.

I would guess that science and technology will continue to develop and attempt to remedy the damage that has been done and work towards healthier ways of living. Considering that the scale of the problem has only received common acceptance since about 2006 (it was known about for decades but concealed as 'bad

for the economy'), significant steps have been taken in terms of the switch to renewable sources of energy, electric cars, and in projects to produce energy through nuclear fusion. The material domain and the intelligence that focuses on it could be assets; the problem has been their disconnection from a balanced immaterial domain. Wisdom in that area has too often proved secondary to the myth of a human supremacy that gives us the right to exploit. The signs are that this may be also be changing. Vigorously prodded by grass-roots activism, popular demonstrations, and the conclusions of climate scientists, political bodies have begun to meet, talk, resolve, and sign agreements – admittedly of a limited scope and power. But even if this is too late to preserve the fullness of the Earth that we currently inhabit, this is a good start.

The tricky task is to bring around the ethics of interdependence in the socio-economic sphere of political organization, trade and managing resources. But that has to be developed through the immaterial realm of values, ethics – and the personal peace and fulfilment that is possible through meditation. By which I mean that the clearing of the mind from fear, aversion, greed and delusion is both ennobling and pleasurable. But for the average person, especially and essentially for the children who will inherit this Earth, this doesn't exclusively mean sitting cross-legged with the eyes closed. It begins with entering a collective domain that will educate our minds. I suggest that such an entry is best made through the external nature of the biosphere and the internal nature of spirituality – especially as these may be at a safe distance from economic and political centres that have become clogged with power.

SPIRITUALITY IS A NATURAL THING

The human mind is a powerful and potentially destructive system. And as the many volunteer-run charities, aid projects and acts of philanthropy make it clear, it's also the case that our compassion

is universal, effective and ennobling. But just as tigers and wolves have to be trained to hunt by their adults, my sense is that the empathic and moral integrity of human beings has to be encouraged to come forth and to widen. Initiation into adulthood is the natural responsibility of the family, village or tribal elders. In former times, dependent on the standards established by the responsible party, all of these three might play a part. Through a process of checking and challenging, each youngster was made to recognize his/her full participation in and responsibility to the group as a whole. (Nowadays this system is replaced by the school and the peer group – but what are the standards?) The biotic community must play a part in human education. Children used to learn about their bodies, and about the diversity and ways of other living beings, in the midst of other intelligences and the protocols of the wild. Growing up with and spending time in nature brings us alertness to a mystery, resilience to challenge and the humility that yet offers us a place in a shared domain. But most youngsters in the developed world will now spend more hours in front of a screen than rambling through woods or splashing around in the local stream. Something is lost. Whereas other humans too often see us as objects and compare and criticize, in nature there are eyes that can look at us, meet our gaze with no judgement or comparison, and shift our awareness into the view of mutuality.

So a good question to consider is: how many people spend time participating in the biotic community? Over 50% of humans now live in urban settings (80% in the UK and USA, 95% in California). To make it even starker, there are more people in the Pearl River conglomerate, or in Tokyo, than in Canada. Although these urban masses are so far exceptional, to what extent does an inhabitant of any large city experience flora and fauna or operate according to biorhythms? Such a loss, combined with the everyday toxins of city life, has drastic repercussions on bodily and mental health. People

are running at an unnatural pace, on adrenalin or other medication. Equally alarming is how tele-reality can severely damage people's ability to be present with each other in an empathic way. With the resultant lack of relational skill we become objects according to a projected norm or standard or system, rather than mutual subjects who respond, negotiate and grow through contact with each other. This may be a significant factor in the problems of attention disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder as well as in as the general decline in people's mental health. At any rate, what must be obvious is that if a child grows up giving more attention to a screen on a device than to organic life, the intelligence and protocols of the device will be their guide on behaviour and identity. And in that tele-domain, everything is surface, instant and deletable; there is no relationship and no empathy.

It is therefore an adult responsibility to protect the biosphere, to encourage access to it, to urge government to act on its behalf and to induct children into its ways. Also to model ethics and responsibility, even beyond the immediate circle of the family, and of other people: to practise the collective subjectivity of 'to others as to myself'. The immaterial bears the seeds of our future; it needs careful attention, love and patient effort.

Ethics is in the spiritual domain, but religions, as they develop external forms and institutions, have clung to their outer forms, their cultural expressions and their territories. What is needed is for religions to focus on their subjective 'interior' meaning of peace, harmony and awareness of an overarching transcendent in order to establish an inter-religious ethic of cooperation.

Here there are positive signs. In 1893, for the first time in recorded history, there was a World's Parliament in which religious leaders stood side by side rather than engage in rebarbative rhetoric and contests over supremacy. There have been no less than six such global meetings since. In 1986, the Assisi gathering brought leaders

of all religions to the home of St. Francis to make declarations on behalf of the environment. The reasoning was that most people in the world follow a religion, and religions endorse a sense of respect for the environment either because it is God's gift, or is part of God, or because they avow harmlessness to living beings. Whatever the outward form of the religion, the heart of its experience is of course subjective, so this pool of spirituality also represented a counter against the 'objective' approach of industry and the myth of the growth economy. So through gathering together in a pilgrimage around Assisi, religious leaders indicated taking a collective step towards mutual action.

In 1989, I was part of the Buddhist representation at Canterbury Cathedral that met with the same agenda. The proceedings began with a formal welcome into the Cathedral and an opening address by Most Rev. John Habgood, the Archbishop of York. His speech centred around a revision of the Old Testament's covenant whereby, through Adam, Jehovah gives humankind dominion over the beasts of the Earth. Reverend Habgood's thesis was that what appeared in the King James' Bible of 1611 as 'dominion' would better be rendered as 'stewardship'.* In terms of subjective meaning, that was quite an adjustment: from exploitation to responsibility. It's a theme that has been more recently reiterated by Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*:

Our 'dominion' over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.

In other paragraphs, the Pope shifts the Biblical account of Creation from the domain of objective fact to the domain of myth, a myth of interconnectivity:

The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human

*That he was interrupted in his address by a member of the congregation denouncing him for allowing 'unbelievers' into the House of God is an indication of the challenges any established Church or religious authority has to face.

existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.

and

... nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image ... justifies absolute domination over other creatures This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is ... to discover God in all things.²⁴

This last passage is suggestive. Its Romantic terms don't actually say it, but the image doesn't grant the human any closer association with God than a leaf has. And if mystical meaning is to be found in a dewdrop, what is so special about the Church – except as a body whereby the meanings of Truth and sanctity may be proclaimed and forged into action? So if humans do have some special place in Creation, it is not as a supreme exploiter, but as a responsible participator. That such a line has emanated not from unorthodox or liberal theologians but from the uppermost echelon of two mainstream Christian Churches also says something.

The implications of the end of dominion can echo throughout the entire cosmos. It could be that the myth of the dominator, with his sword and wrath, is coming to an end. Under less constraint to accommodate more conservative voices in the Church, theologians who are not at its apex have commented:

We know not what God is. God himself doesn't know what He is because He is not anything. Literally God is not, because He transcends being.
John Scottus Eriugena (c. 840 CE)

and

the God of Christianity *isn't* a Supreme Being ... a kind of big guy who sits in a throne on high ... God and the world aren't two things ... God is the reason why the world *is* at all. God is perhaps the Unconditioned, the Unborn, Unbegotten, Unmade, without which... there'd be no release from suffering.²⁵

Brother Selwyn Gross (1993)

and

God, then, is not a force who acts on the world through coercion, violence or the suspension of physics and free will. Instead, God is something that we participate in. God is a verb, an action we bring to the world to make love, justice, mercy, joy and goodness known.²⁶

Jason Derr (2010)

With the shift from the domination paradigm; with the realization of selfhood as being an ongoing relational experience; with the understanding of the mind as being a multi-layered and shared domain that is conditioned by its cultural and biological environment; and with the idea of learning from the biosphere instead of exploiting it, something more inclusive could be dawning. My wish is that we learn promptly and follow through on these developments. The alternative is a catastrophe unprecedented in human history.



Earth-Ritual: A Dialogue

Here are some suggestions for enacting an Earth-ritual. It is an approach that enters the mythic domain, so the moves, although contemplative, align to that area of your awareness rather than to the commonplace reality. Although you may like to use elements of this ritual as a more regular practice, what I'm outlining here would be a yearly, or seasonal, occurrence. An occasion. As such, it requires certain protocols, some training and practice. However, it can effect a personal deepening, act as an underpinning for a community, and reset your energies and perspectives.

PREPARATION

Personal preparation involves meditative training in order to readily bring your awareness into the chosen focus. It also means learning to silently express qualities such as goodwill and respect; a devotional sense. If you are familiar with Buddhist puja, chanting and such devotional practices, this will be fairly straightforward.

You are advised to learn how to fast, in various ways, until it isn't a struggle. Fasting in the most obvious sense means abstaining from either any food, or solid food, for at least twelve hours. (But during some of this, you'll be asleep). With practice, this steadies bodily energies and heightens your somatic sensitivity. Of course, you can work towards that end by eating a light meal, or just soup as you adjust. In this instance, fasting also means abstaining from Internet or any 'tele-' contact for a similar period. When the ritual takes place, a further abstinence is to refrain from conversation or considerations outside of the context of the occasion.

Preparing the venue for the ritual means finding a place that you don't use for any commonplace purpose. Ideally this will be an area of uncultivated land of a good size – unless you have a sizeable back garden in which you could designate an area for this use only. If you're fortunate enough to have access to some nearby land, or you choose a more distant place to go to on a seasonal basis, don't tidy it up, just move to one side (taking care not to damage any life forms) only what is needed to find enough space for the ritual.

As far as time goes, the ceremonial heart of it may take an hour or two. However, it's best to put aside most of a day to get to your place, set things up and also return home.

OPENING PROCEDURE

For most purposes, the ceremony is communal, so the three or more of you need to gather and settle. After the greetings, avoid conversations or bringing in details of your daily life – unless, as with a death, you want to include that experience in the ceremony. Then you should inform the other participants as such an event is bound to affect you, and by extension, them. You should establish any sense of leadership or time boundaries before the ceremony. Rather than keep referring to a clock, it may be more harmonious to mark a candle to delineate periods of ten (or five) minutes burning, and then time the elements of the proceedings in accord with how much of the candle has burnt down. And of course, no photographs should be taken.

Settling in means walking around slowly until you find your place, while intending to be part of an inclusive group. Then sit down, or stand, and let the group find its form. The focus is the Earth, but the ceremony will need a central element. This could be a rock or a tree or a pool; you may want to add a sacred image to it, but the focus is the natural world. Circumambulating this focal point can be part of the procedure, or you may prefer to stay in one place.

The ceremony begins when everyone is settled. Over time you may develop your own style of protocols, but they should begin with making offerings to the focal centre, the Earth-shrine. Offerings are material – such as flowers – and immaterial – such as chanting, dedications and commitments.

In terms of materials, flowers, incense and candles are traditional Buddhist offerings: flowers represent the unfolding of ethical awareness, incense represents the solid but fragrant quality of the collected mind, candlelight represents clarity. The act of offering entails bringing your body in line with that action: holding the offerings with both hands, bowing one's head to the shrine and then placing the offerings at the shrine.

When everyone has made their material offerings, and someone has lit the timer-candle, then the group can offer voice and heart through chanting. For a Buddhist, this can be the Refuges, or the '*Itipi so ...*' salutation to the Buddha. Reciting a mantra for at least ten minutes, or an appropriate measure on the candle is also a good idea. The purpose of these recitations is for the group to generate a tonality that is heartfelt and shared. When the chanting is concluded, there's an opportunity to express the group commitments or aspirations. This can be done by having one individual slowly iterate an agreed-upon set of principles with the rest of the group chiming in. These aspirations and commitments should include non-abuse through body, speech or mind, non-exploitation and non-indulgence – to use the material world with respect and restraint. After this, continue in silence.

EARTH DIALOGUE

In the silence, centre in your body through the spine and extend your awareness slowly and steadily out through the sense-doors, without losing that internal axis. For this, it's best to extend awareness through the centre of the chest rather than your eyes (going out through your eyes will probably mean that you lose your bodily presence). But with all the sense-doors open, extend awareness, and

then the attitude of ‘greeting’. Another way of expressing ‘greeting’ is just to sustain a steady openness to the world around you, without expectations. The candle could burn down quite a way; none of this operates at the pace of human interaction.


As you settle into that meditative state, is there any quality present in the landscape that you feel appreciative of? It could be the visual aspect of the environment, or its overall freshness, or a more specific feature of the visual or the auditory landscape. Take in the feature and the sense of appreciation. Linger in that receptivity. Can you sense and express to yourself what quality you appreciate, such as ‘resilience’, ‘delicacy’, ‘radiance’? How does that quality feel to you? Can you take that in, absorb it? (It’s best to focus on the centre of our chest for this.)

When you enter that full receptivity or absorption, feel out for a response. What would you ‘say’ to that source of appreciation (given that you’re not going to speak)? What gesture would you incline towards? Linger with this for a good while; don’t strain to receive or express – this will only block the channel.

CONCLUSION

When you have concluded your ‘dialogue’, you might sit, stand or walk mindfully for a while. Either enter another Earth dialogue, or share your experience in the group.

Before leaving the area, it’s good to take any practical steps that you can think of for the welfare of the land, or express thanks in a ritual way, with chanting and offerings.



Part VI

A World Beyond?

AND HOW IS IT, BHIKKHUS, THAT BY PROTECTING ONESELF, ONE PROTECTS OTHERS?

BY THE PURSUIT, DEVELOPMENT AND CULTIVATION [OF MINDFULNESS]...

AND HOW IS IT, BHIKKHUS, THAT BY PROTECTING OTHERS ONE IS PROTECTING ONESELF?

BY PATIENCE, HARMLESSNESS, LOVING-KINDNESS AND SYMPATHY.

IT IS IN SUCH A WAY THAT BY PROTECTING OTHERS ONE PROTECTS ONESELF.

(S.47: 19)

UMUNTU NGUMUNTU NGABANTU

(PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE BECAUSE OF [OTHER] PEOPLE.)

ZULU AXIOM





Epilogue and Prologue

THE THING ABOUT BEING HUMAN IS THAT WE HAVE TO TOUCH THE EARTH, WE HAVE TO ACCEPT THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS HUMAN FORM AND PLANETARY LIFE. AND JUST BY DOING THAT, THEN THE WAY OUT OF SUFFERING ISN'T THROUGH GETTING OUT OF OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCE BY LIVING IN REFINED CONSCIOUS STATES, BUT BY EMBRACING THE TOTALITY OF ALL THE HUMAN AND BRAHMA REALMS THROUGH MINDFULNESS. IN THIS WAY, THE BUDDHA POINTED TO A TOTAL REALIZATION RATHER THAN A TEMPORARY ESCAPE THROUGH REFINEMENT AND BEAUTY. THIS IS WHAT THE BUDDHA MEANS WHEN HE IS POINTING THE WAY TO NIBBANA.¹

AJAHN SUMEDHO

A FERTILE MATRIX

I'm reviewing and tidying up this manuscript in a small (4m. x 3.5m.) hut in a cloud forest reserve in Ecuador. It's about 2,300 metres up, misty and moist. The hut I'm occupying is the most remote one in the centre's 700 hectares; it's rarely used and in need of repair – the door doesn't meet the floor, daylight beams in through the gaps in the walls – but I feel very comfortable. Every other day, enough electricity is produced by a diesel generator in an hour and a half to power this laptop; apart from that it's candles. A combination of the steady support of the couple who invited me here and offer my daily meal, half-a-dozen hours of meditation, and walks through the trails in the forest make for a warm and vibrant abiding. One side of the hut is almost entirely glass, and looks over a thickly forested

valley (whenever the clouds lift) to the further ridge. The landscape is amazingly lush and chiming with birdsong. I'm told that the forest is second-growth – that it was all clear-cut a couple of decades ago for timber and pasture – but all that has ceased, and the ferns, mosses, bamboo, and trees with their epiphytes and creepers have regenerated into a rich and diverse ecosystem. Nature, given the chance, is immensely potent.

To stand in the forest and take it in is to be flooded: eyes receive an uncountable range of floral impressions from the towering trees to the tiny furling mosses. Sounds sweep through: the drip of the drizzle, modulated by the leaves that it falls on, the intermittent jazz of birdsong, and the distant roar of descending streams. On a bodily level, I feel the warmth of my form, its tingling skin, and a sense of being wrapped in fresh energy. You can smell the freshness in the air, almost taste it. And opening to all that, there's a beyond: a stillness where 'inner' and 'outer' aren't established. To stand here is to feel satisfied, settled, amazed and grateful.

Although the centre is mostly for ecologists, birders and botanists, I'm here because I'm a bhikkhu. This way of life, supported by free-will generosity and offering teachings and whatever my willingness to listen gives people, is a field of blessings that still surprises me in its plenitude. While I'm here I am not required to contribute anything – whatever the presence of a gone-forth person affirms speaks for me. The roots of the Sangha ecosystem touch into the free-roaming nature of our humanity, as well as the earthed and secure nature of our awareness. And it's held in a shared social matrix. For those who can participate, awareness blossoms.

But how can Dhamma support liberation and healing in the wider world? Samaṇas, dwelling in the margin of the social domain, may not seem to be living in the real world. As a colleague, Ajahn Sona, commented: *'People ask me why we don't go on Peace demonstrations. But every day our lives are a peace demonstration.'* And not just us:

the peace demonstration has been going on for over 2,500 years – along with our steady advice to quit drinking, harmful speech and sexual misconduct. These simple standards haven't been adopted on a global scale. But sure, we get out there with talks, retreats, advice – as well as with environmental action. What chance is there that this line of action will take hold? Meanwhile, Ajahn Sona himself has done a remarkable job in his monastery, Sitavana in British Columbia, converting the old buildings with insulation and solar panels so that the entire monastery is energy self-sufficient.² But every forest monastery that I know of is bonded to its local environment and ethically and ecologically attuned. Tree-planting, solar and hydro-power projects; accommodation and refuge free of charge to those who can attune to the norms – all these are standard, with frugality as a norm. My living space in Cittaviveka, England is a wooden hut similar in size to this, but more carefully built. I spend the hours of darkness in meditation with just a candle or an LED lamp for illumination; there are no appliances whirring away. It does have underfloor heating, powered by electricity, but most of the monastery is heated by our own renewable heat-source. And when things feel too comfortable, I can resort to a simpler hut in the woods.

Maybe the principle teaching that a *samaṇa* offers, other than morality, is the happiness of renunciation: that 'less' is the new 'more'. But as I travel and see the amount of energy being used in shop displays, in background music, and in activities that merely pass the time, just this is teaching enough. At a time when consumerism is devouring the planet, and when there is so much needless waste, the environmental mantra – 'Reduce, Repair, Recycle' – must transcend all national and religious boundaries. As with any degree of renunciation, this does require passing through some disorientation and even discomfort, but the benefits are enormous. It brings us into harmony with each other and the Earth; it gives us a perspective and meaning that make us sufficient to ourselves; it frees us from the rat

race and its compulsions. Lastly, I would say that if we seek our global as well as individual welfare, it is a necessary passage.

The passage is uncomfortable, but people are losing patience with the status quo. Public demonstrations against perceived injustice are leading to confrontation with the powers of State. No more so than in South America, where the descendants of the less than ten percent of the indigenous population that survived the conquistadors are gathering, and unifying to protest against the business interests that took over their land. The Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests sent a representative group to the Bonn climate conference in 2017 to seek support. Their stewardship of the land makes sound environmental and economic sense – it costs nothing and is estimated to be worth \$25-\$34 billion in carbon benefits over the next twenty years. In Brazil, after public outcry, the government cancelled plans to open up the Renca reserve to mining corporations.

More recently, a so-far non-violent confrontation has been reported in Ecuador, where the local people of an Amazonian area are checking and resisting illegal gold mining that discharges mercury into their drinking water and source of fish. The local president of the region is reported as stating: *‘For many years we have witnessed invaders exploiting the resources in our ancestral territory without our consent. Today we are saying, “No more.”’*³ In neighbouring Colombia, the Nasa Indians – the biggest, most organized and most militant of the local indigenous groups – are moving into direct action to reclaim their ancestral territory. On a regular basis and wielding machetes, hundreds (at times thousands) of activists burn and hack down plantations of sugar cane, occupy the land and plant traditional crops that they can eat, such as maize and cassava. Naturally, the government looking at the legal agreements, rights of ownership, and the need to sustain marketing presence in the global economy, opposes this. Confrontation and fatalities occur.

The question is: from where can the common ground arise? How much does it take before the long-standing grievances and world-view of indigenous people can be given careful attention? After over 500 years, isn't a land settlement due?

If this is the prologue for change, what can Buddhist practice contribute? Careful attention, non-violence and empathy: this may be the piece that *samaṇas* can offer and embody – just because they are not engaged. As Ajahn Sona commented at a Buddhist-Christian gathering on environmental issues:

... Buddhism creates a context around environmentalism – an attitude that lightens the self-polluting emotions of frustration, anger, and despair which so often fuel well-meaning environmentalists in the West ... The critical leadership that these people offer ... needs to be supplemented by a healthier, non-self-destructive attitude that Buddhist meditative techniques and philosophical attitudes can provide.⁴

This is a moderating note that might otherwise get missed among the calls for justice and the soft '*crump!*' of tear-gas canisters.

THE GLOBAL TURNING: FROM THE MONEY TO THE MARGINS

Offering this book, I am aware of its many limitations. I've barely suggested practical alternatives; I offer only connections and lines of inquiry. This is because my part in this is just to do that; Buddhism is not a resource for technological know-how or political finesse. The role of a Dhamma-teacher is to refer to the mind-sets behind these and cast light on the suffering that their misuse brings. Regarding the topic of the environment and what that topic involves, I have relied on indirect knowledge rather than direct experience, although as this has been gleaned from a wide range of sources, this may be held to be free of bias.

In summary, what is being reported from a number of sources is:

- Pollution of the air we breathe has reached life-threatening proportions in some areas. Fossil-fuel emissions are a major contributor to this.

Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change

In the name of Allah, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate we affirm

- We affirm that –
- God created the Earth in perfect equilibrium (*mizān*);
- By His immense mercy we have been given fertile land, fresh air, clean water and all the good things on Earth that makes our lives here viable and delightful;
- The Earth functions in natural seasonal rhythms and cycles: a climate in which living beings – including humans – thrive;
- The present climate change catastrophe is a result of the human disruption of this balance –
- We affirm the natural state (*fitrah*) of God's creation –

2.5 We recognize the corruption (*fasād*) that humans have caused on the Earth due to our relentless pursuit of economic growth and consumption. Its consequences have been –

- Global climate change, which is our present concern, in addition to:
- Contamination and befoulment of the atmosphere, land, inland water systems, and seas;
- Soil erosion, deforestation and desertification;
- Damage to human health, including a host of modern-day diseases.

•••

- We recognize that we are but a miniscule part of the divine order, yet within that order, we are exceptionally powerful beings, and have the responsibility to establish good and avert evil in every way we can. We also recognize that –

- We are but one of the multitude of living beings with whom we share the Earth;

- We have no right to oppress the rest of creation or cause it harm;

- Intelligence and conscience behoove us, as our faith commands, to treat all things with care and awe (*taqwa*) of their Creator, compassion (*rahmah*) and utmost good (*ihsan*).

•••

- We recognize that we are accountable for all our actions –

2.8 In view of these considerations we affirm that our responsibility as Muslims is to act according to the example of the Prophet Muhammad (God's peace and blessings be upon him) who –

- Declared and protected the rights of all living beings, outlawed the custom of burying infant girls alive, prohibited killing living beings for sport, guided his companions to conserve water even in washing for prayer, forbade the felling of trees in the desert, ordered a man who had taken some nestlings from their nest to return them to their mother, and when he came upon a man who had lit a fire on an

anthill, commanded, “Put it out, put it out!”;

- Established inviolable zones (*harams*) around Makkah and Al-Madinah, within which native plants may not be felled or cut and wild animals may not be hunted or disturbed;
- Established protected areas (*himas*) for the conservation and sustainable use of rangelands, plant cover and wildlife.
- Lived a frugal life, free of excess, waste, and ostentation;
- Renewed and recycled his meagre possessions by repairing or giving them away;
- Ate simple, healthy food, which only occasionally included meat;
- Took delight in the created world; and
- Was, in the words of the Qur’an, “a mercy to all beings.”

•••

WE CALL

3.1 We call upon the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Kyoto Protocol taking place in Paris this December, 2015 to bring their discussions to an equitable and binding conclusion, bearing in mind –

- The scientific consensus on climate change, which is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate systems;
- The need to set clear targets and monitoring systems;
- The dire consequences to planet earth if we do not do so;

• The enormous responsibility the COP shoulders on behalf of the rest of humanity, including leading the rest of us to a new way of relating to God’s Earth.

3.2 We particularly call on the well-off nations and oil-producing states to –

- Lead the way in phasing out their greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible and no later than the middle of the century;
- Provide generous financial and technical support to the less well-off to achieve a phase-out of greenhouse gases as early as possible;
- Recognize the moral obligation to reduce consumption so that the poor may benefit from what is left of the earth’s non-renewable resources;
- Stay within the ‘2 degree’ limit, or, preferably, within the ‘1.5 degree’ limit, bearing in mind that two-thirds of the earth’s proven fossil fuel reserves remain in the ground;
- Re-focus their concerns from unethical profit from the environment, to that of preserving it and elevating the condition of the world’s poor.
- Invest in the creation of a green economy.

3.3 We call on the people of all nations and their leaders to –

- Aim to phase out greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible in order to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere;
- Commit themselves to 100% renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy as early as possible, to mitigate the environmental impact of their activities;
- Invest in decentralized renewable energy, which is the best way to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development;

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- Realize that to chase after unlimited economic growth in a planet that is finite and already overloaded is not viable. Growth must be pursued wisely and in moderation; placing a priority on increasing the resilience of all, and especially the most vulnerable, to the climate change impacts already underway and expected to continue for many years to come.

- Set in motion a fresh model of wellbeing, based on an alternative to the current financial model which depletes resources, degrades the environment, and deepens inequality.

- Prioritise adaptation efforts with appropriate support to the vulnerable countries with the least capacity to adapt. And to vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, women and children.

3.4 We call upon corporations, finance, and the business sector to –

- Shoulder the consequences of their profit-making activities, and take a visibly more active role in reducing their carbon footprint and other forms of impact upon the natural environment;
- In order to mitigate the environmental impact of their activities, commit themselves to 100% renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy as early as possible and shift investments into renewable energy;
- Change from the current business model which is based on an unsustainable escalating economy, and to adopt a circular economy that is wholly sustainable;

- Pay more heed to social and ecological responsibilities, particularly to the extent that they extract and utilize scarce resources;
- Assist in the divestment from the fossil fuel driven economy and the scaling up of renewable energy and other ecological alternatives.

3.5 We call on all groups to join us in collaboration, co-operation and friendly competition in this endeavour and we welcome the significant contributions taken by other faiths, as we can all be winners in this race.

• • •

If we each offer the best of our respective traditions, we may yet see a way through our difficulties.

3.6 Finally, we call on all Muslims wherever they may be –

Heads of state
Political leaders
Business community
UNFCCC delegates
Religious leaders and scholars
Mosque congregations
Islamic endowments (*awqaf*)
Educators and educational institutions
Community leaders
Civil society activists
Non-governmental organisations
Communications and media

• • •

Do not strut arrogantly on the earth.

You will never split the earth apart
nor will you ever rival the mountains' stature.
Qur'an 17: 37

(Draft prepared by a team of Islamic academics and environmentalists, circulated through Ecolslam, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Climate Action Network and the Forum on

Religion and Ecology and launched at the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium held in Istanbul, August 2015)

VI.1

- Pollution of the water we drink as well as the water that sustains aquatic life (animals and plants) has reached the point where rivers, lakes and areas of the oceans are dead. As aquatic life moderates CO₂, this also contributes to climate change.
- Climate change is a fact, as evidenced by the steady and continuing meltdown of the polar ice-caps. Loss of their reflective surface means that the Earth increasingly warms up under the sun. Sea-levels will rise, overwhelming island nations and threatening coastal areas and cities.
- Insect life has been devastated by insecticides used in agriculture; this threatens pollination and fruit production. Bird populations have also plummeted to the point where one in eight birds are on the endangered species list.
- Plastic waste has saturated the Earth's water, destroyed millions of marine animals and is now present in people's bodies.
- Meat production is increasing, even though it uses up fertile land, both for the animals and the production of animal feed. Intensive production is common and involves incarcerating animals in cages that they can't even turn round in. Gases from their bodies add to global warming.
- Trees are being cut down at a faster rate than they are being replaced.
- Topsoil is disappearing, and cannot readily be regenerated.
- The human population currently stands at around 7 billion; it is projected to reach 11 billion by the year 2100. The positive footnote is that wherever women rise out of poverty and have control over reproduction, the birth-rate drops.

All statistics offer the viewpoint of whoever is presenting them. So it's not just *what* but *who* you trust. If the figures come from a party that stands to gain money or power because of them, one must

take a sceptical stance. 'Follow the money' is a cynical adage, but it bears checking out. How come fats got blamed for the damage that refined sugar does to human health? Cola, cakes and candies – sugar is big business. How come fossil-fuel production went unchecked, and remains largely so, when its environmental damage was pointed out in the 1970s? And members of oil companies sit on the board of the bodies that advise the UK government on energy policy? Furthermore, with the understanding of the mistakes of history, the details of scientific research and the environmental destruction that we can witness through our own senses – why does so little get done? Some promises and targets ... Meanwhile, in the USA, the KXL oil pipeline is given the go-ahead (it's already leaked oil into North Dakota); in Canada, the Kinder Morgan pipeline is given government approval; in the UK, the government overrules the local authority and people to allow fracking; in Australia, giant coal mining projects are given the thumbs up. The first conclusion that one can arrive at is that the marriage of power with money is responsible; but given that much of what transpires in the corridors of power is hidden from our attention, who even knows all the details of what's going on?

From my perspective, I would suggest that the root of all *that* is the domination paradigm. This covers politics, economy, land-use and the cultural status quo. Put simply, its thesis is: 'our group are right, we have rights over and above others, and we cannot happily survive without using our superiority to divert planetary resources our way.' The fact that this makes us needy, insecure, resented, stressed and depressed isn't in the account: 'Just try harder' is the advice. But as we learn slowly and partially, this paradigm doesn't achieve its aims, and currently it is putting all of life at risk. To begin to tackle that paradigm we have to keep referring to our own most constant reference – our own hearts and minds – and make them a secure source of well-being. Because our own intimate condition is a holistic representation of the world around us. So for our own

welfare, the domination paradigm has to shift to one of warm-hearted respect, cooperation and a softening of defensiveness.

This is how human nature works best. In fact, wherever change in terms of a healthier relationship to any aspect of our environment is taking place, you'll see signs of this; examples of ethics and generosity and sharing. It's natural. You'll see examples of cooperation, you'll see volunteers and movements that are values-based and that transcend national, racial, religious or financial boundaries. And you'll notice wiser stewardship of resources. It's happening already: for example, the Transition network, originating in the UK and covering twenty-six towns with four hundred affiliates world-wide, encourages replacing the fossil-fuel-based economy with growth of local produce (thereby lessening the carbon-costs of transportation). In India, ten million families take part in roughly 100,000 'forest-management groups' responsible for protecting nearby woodlands. Consequently, in India the percentage of woodland has increased since 2005. In Niger, poor farmers have 'regreened' 12.5 million desolate acres, supporting the growth of 200 million trees to complement their land's productivity. Sometimes the commons is activated through remarkable individuals: a Kenyan woman, Wangari Maathai, set up the Green Belt Movement to combat deforestation and promote women's rights; the Movement had enabled poor women to plant over 30 million trees by the time she passed away in 2011 (the current figure is 51 million).

These are not institutions; this is grass-roots development, representing a return to healthy human nature. People learn that it's normal and enjoyable to work together and share resources; and furthermore to extend a sense of mutuality to include a wider range of the entire biosphere. In this way, the benefits are also mutual: through more careful actions towards the Earth, people develop values that nourish their humanity.

Grass-roots initiatives, even when taken by one person alone, can trickle upwards. This is because outside of the big financial, political, or religious power blocs, life gets more nimble. There's less to have to conserve, less investment and less to lose. Dominators, on the other hand, are insecure, fear change and don't like risking their holdings. However, if the initiatives do make sense in a holistic way (less cost, better place to live, people happier), then the bigger enterprises take note. After Rwanda banned non-biodegradable plastic bags, the state of California recently passed a bill to ban their free distribution; European governments asserted an intention (!) to get plastic wrappings off supermarket shelves. It's also the case that consumers have influence: for example, various food outlets in the UK from Pret a Manger and Selfridges to the Zoological Society of London are following the move against plastic by not using plastic straws or disposable plastic cups, and providing water fountains or free filtered water in glass bottles. The big car producers are shifting to electrically powered engines; Google and Apple are now energy-sourced by at or near 100% renewables. Many American cities are taking a stand against the avowed intent of the federal government to step out of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord by supporting reduced usage of fossil fuels; altogether twelve hundred mayors and business leaders signed a declaration of intent to stay in accord with Paris rather than Washington. All this, undertaken in the hard-nosed world of politics and business, represents a change in view, perhaps even a revolution.

The shift that is needed is held in the minds of many people. But rather than use the term 'grass-roots', I'd offer a more universally applicable metaphor. I suggest that the turn/movement originates in the margins and moves in to the centre. Margins are around and within all of us, and they're growing. Although the central mind-set and the central status quo get the headlines and consume the energy, they are just going round and round to nowhere useful.

This 'domination' (or 'attempt to dominate') mind-set is in constant strife and is shrinking. As a socio-economic paradigm, it has to keep squeezing more people to increase its growth and grip, so as people who were in the mainstream get drawn or pushed to the margins, the margins grow.

In many cases, this is a desperate plight; but it also offers scenarios for new growth: previously incompatible native people and settlers, conservatives and liberals, small-time farmers and academics get together, manifest solidarity, share and gain in terms of community. I am reminded of the lines that were drawn at Standing Rock, when the Trump administration cancelled the agreement to not site an oil pipe through sacred and environmentally-sensitive land. Not only did indigenous people gather from all over the USA, but the descendants of settlers, including retired army veterans, stood with them. As a note in the margin, but of another order of significance, the veterans took it upon themselves to offer an apology to the Native Americans for the atrocities that their predecessors had perpetrated.

Standing Rock was lost, but maybe a foothold has been planted on fertile ground. Because every revolution supported by violence and resulting in glory has finally failed: the American Revolution itself, three hundred years later, has not resulted in a fair and just status quo. Neither has the French, Russian nor Chinese. Glory dazzles us; the winners get to feel righteous, empowered, and lose balance. Can we instead gather around an aim to include and let that inclusivity guide our social norms?

Movements, like Gandhi's, that are powered by truth, humility and non-violence have a particular momentum. In their rightness, they have the swing of a pendulum, with all the inevitability of the changes in the Chinese classic *I Ching*. As the poet Seamus Heaney writes: '*What looks the strongest has outlived its term./ The future lies with what's affirmed from under.*'⁷⁵ This was first published in 1987, two years before the Soviet Union broke up without bloodshed.

MIND, MYTH AND THE WORLD BEYOND

No doubt we can all make individual efforts, and we can look into reducing our own environmental footprints. I've added a few suggestions, perhaps obvious ones, elsewhere. But I'd also counsel looking within. In terms of mind, its margins are to be explored by meditation: by entering into the ground of the psyche, and even into the aware space from which the psyche arises.

This domain has been affected by domination attitudes and mythologies, played out in terms of culture and religion. Historically, as visions of truth became ossified by dogma into supremacy-claiming religions, they have engendered conflict, and provided no effective counter to the growth of objective knowing or 'science'. In fact, religion in its institutional lust for power, has falsely claimed objective truth, or ignored the mundane world. So I would suggest that whether the 'birthplace of truth' is Dhamma or God, we need to live in accordance with that truth: we're here together, and that necessitates mutuality and ethics, fellow-feeling and mercy.

Moreover, all the major religions assert that there is a 'world beyond' that we can have access to. This 'world beyond' could be interpreted in terms of refined states of consciousness in our own minds, or of another mystic reality, or of visions of the Divinity; but the common understanding of millennia of human exploration of the immaterial says that this sensory-material domain is not the only place, nor the best that we can inhabit.

In Buddhism, as well as in other mystic traditions, there's an understanding that the highest is a state or domain where our normal sensory world does not arise. The highest domain is entered through goodness and purity of heart, just as the lowest and most wretched are entered through evil. So any approach through which others realize this should surely be respected. Moreover, as all traditions acknowledge that the world is frequented by evil forces, could it not be that those figures, commands and mythic scenarios that proclaim exclusivity and the right to dominate are our universal enemy?

Suggestions

If having read this, you'd like to take some action, there are a number of ways in which you can. You need to decide and apply some careful attention to what is within your range. I would recommend that you approach the topic from where you sense your concern meets your living situation, and accessing a sense of empathy, follow through with resolve. Use it as an exercise in extending your boundaries, of developing *pāramī*, and of taking on a course of action that asks you to give up something, or to make an effort – even when the results aren't certain. This sets up a tone of practice that will feel more grounded and integrated than if you concern yourself too much with saving the world (although you will of course save a bit of it).

1 Meditate more

If you develop meditation, your calm, contentment and ability to focus will grow. These resources help to reduce your needs, strengthen your attention, and keep you in touch with your values: so you are likely to buy less and consume less, and be more responsible with what you do use.

2 What do I consume?

Food: Cut down on, or give up, using animal produce – for your own welfare, the animals', and that of the planet. Meat and fish in particular will contain chemicals to enhance flavour, or make the creature grow, or to preserve the flesh post-slaughter. Fish is liable

to also contain micro-plastic particles.

Favour locally-produced produce over imported fruit and veg. – there's less transportation required. If you purchase vegetables from an outdoor market, you can use the ones that aren't perfectly shaped.

Plastic: Work on reducing the use of non-recyclable plastic. You can use a flask to carry water around. Carry a bag for shopping; refuse plastic ones. Buy paper-wrapped soap, etc. rather than the plastic bottles of gel, etc. If you can, mention that you're doing this to the management of the store.

Fossil fuel: In terms of transport, arrange a car-share, or use public transportation. Try some walking! Give up flying for a year. Use LED bulbs for lighting. Insulate your home to preserve heat, wear more clothes, etc.

3 What can I support?

Any way in which you can connect to and participate with environmentally-concerned groups and bodies will strengthen them. Organised environmental groups have successfully triggered government action; an individual is unlikely to do so.

There may be a clean-up project or a movement to restore a piece of local land – such as a dump or an abandoned pasture that you can actively participate in. This should be enjoyable and create some human connections.

Religion and myth may not seem that important to the average person these days: if religions are about some ‘world beyond’, or an ‘inner spirit’, what is their relevance to our daily lives? My understanding is that our minds are porous and open to many worlds: those of religion and myth, those of secular materialism, and those of national mythologies. Any of these can occupy the psyche and become the sole focus of our lives. But with the understanding that myth and meaning originate in the mind, and that the contents of mind are dependent on the natural and social environment, such mental content can be seen in terms of a wider perspective and assessed in terms of its effect on the cosmos. This is a religious process, one that requires spiritual strength and guidance.

Why this internal avenue into the cosmos should capture my interest is that of all of them, it seems the easiest to purify directly in oneself each and every day. This is because spiritual guidance touches the most fundamental and uplifting aspects of our minds – and that affects everything. In the manifest world that we share, such guidance is bound to have positive results. The ageless assertion is that the remedial power of the good is brought close by our intentions, prayers, and actions.

It may well be the case that in the multi-cultural interfaith atmosphere of the global community, the choice of religion will be more a matter of individual faith than of cultural obligation. Right practice will then replace the dogma and positions that generate division. Even the degree to which we adhere to the labels is up for inquiry:

... [One who has] a deeper and deeper understanding of Dhamma... would discover that there is no such thing called ‘religion’: that there is no Buddhism; there is no Christianity; there is no Islam. Therefore how can they be the same or conflicting? It just isn’t possible.⁶

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Finally, I am often struck by the myth of how Buddhism, as a teaching, arose. The fable has it that the newly Awakened One, having realized nibbāna at the foot of the Bodhi tree, spent a further six weeks dwelling in the bliss of enlightenment and contemplating the dependent arising and ceasing of *dukkha*. After recognizing that his life had to be one of serving and honouring the Dhamma, he reasoned that there was no point putting its truth into verbal form and expounding it to others:

This Dhamma that I have attained to is profound and hard to see, hard to understand ... But this generation relies on attachment* ... It is hard for this generation to see this truth, that is to say ... dependent arising. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations (*sankhārā*), the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna. And if I taught the Dhamma others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me.

But then the supreme Brahma deity, Sahampati (Father of All), knowing that inclination, descended to this plane, and on bended knee implored the Buddha:

Venerable sir, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma ... There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are wasting through not hearing the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.

(M.26: 19-20; S.6: 1 *Brahmasaṃyutta*)

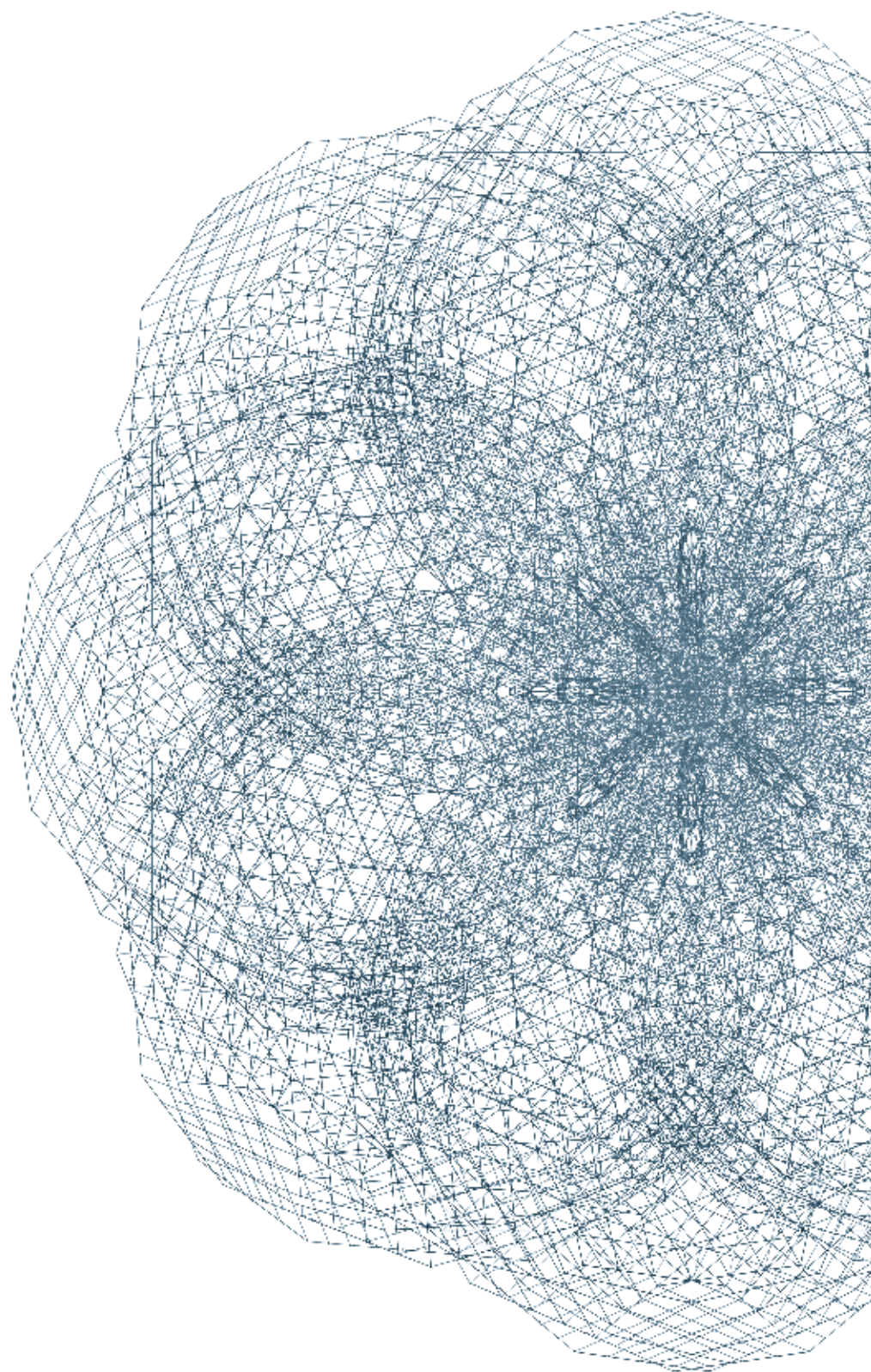
So, out of compassion (*anukampa*), the Buddha decided to formulate a teaching.

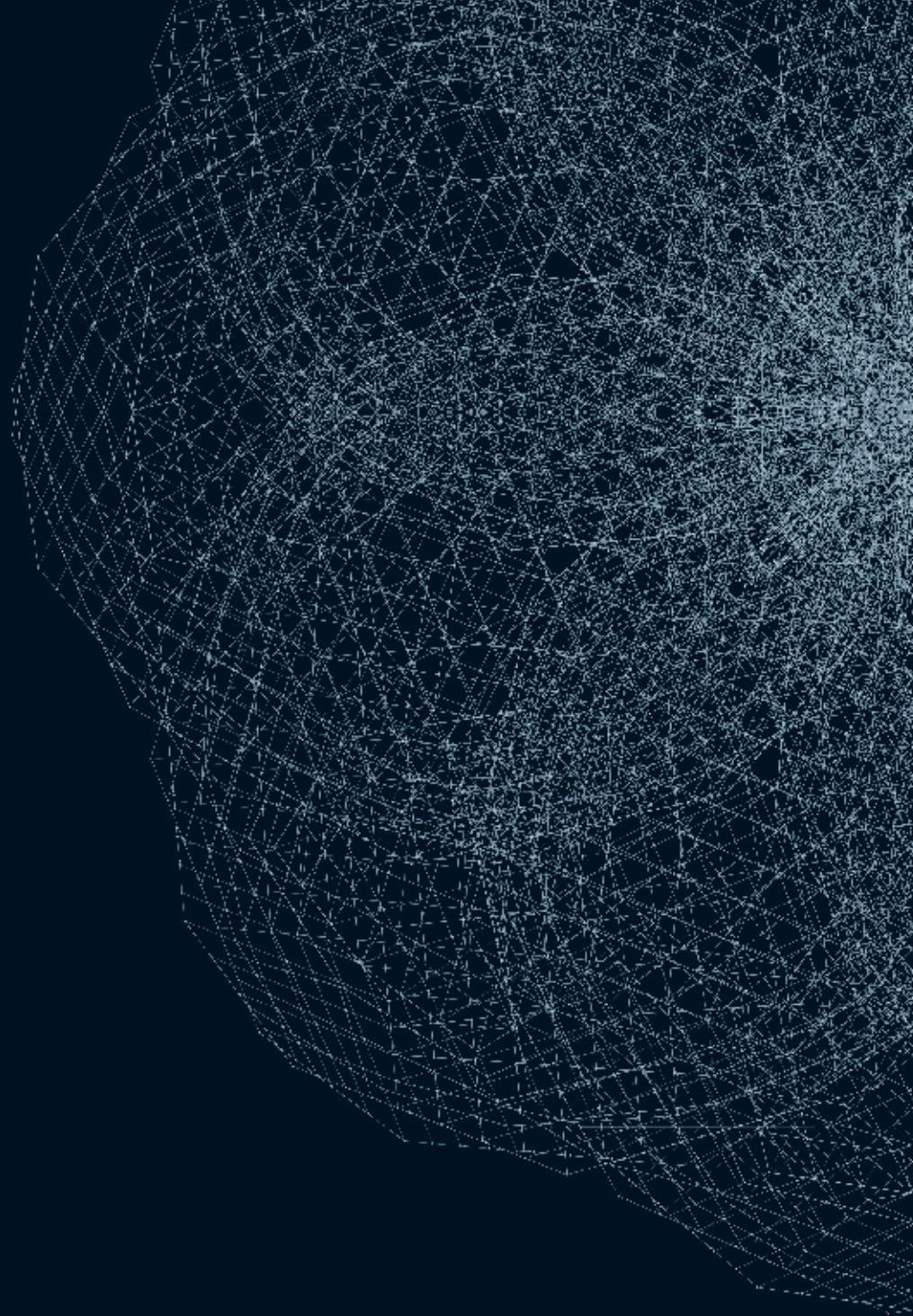
Colourful – but believable? Well, myth is myth, and I reflect on it. How could it be that a mind that has acquired such a degree of penetration, such a depth of absorption that the sensory world fades out, could still be accessible to some ‘voice’? Where does that voice come from? From within? From another world? How and why does

*‘Attachment’ here is a translation of ‘*alāya*’, a term that carries nuances of storing and hoarding.

that voice turn towards the world of humans? Why does it even care? The action that the Brahma deity takes, for me at least, suggests that in the vast web of the material/immaterial cosmos, this tiny and querulous humanity, bonded to earth and death as it is, occupies a crucial node. The very gesture of kneeling is an acknowledgement that it is up to our earthed intelligence to keep the cosmos rolling rightly. Even the sublime must kneel before the altar of right endeavour.

It is no less fitting that an Awakened One is a Tathāgata, ‘one who has gone beyond’, but also ‘one who has truly arrived’ in this paradoxical and often violent world. Thus when the mind resides in the ‘birthplace of truth’, there isn’t the trumpet of righteousness but the empathic resonance of *anukampa*. In humility and compassion, the truth of being human-in-the-environment makes itself felt. This is *dhammatā* – this is ‘in accord with nature’; it is the example of all the teachers and prophets. To the traumatized people rising up in their grief and fury, to those in power who draw up agreements on paper while armed police defend them, to most of us who look on dumbfounded: can this example not be our guide and practice?





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AMARAVATI PUBLICATIONS
AMARAVATI BUDDHIST MONASTERY
GREAT GADDESSEN, HERTFORDSHIRE, HP1 3BZ
UNITED KINGDOM

EMAIL: PUBLICATIONS@AMARAVATI.ORG

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ISBN: 978-1-78432-131-4

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COVER & BOOK DESIGN & FORMATTING:
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