

Running Tide The Voice of Amida Shu:

**Pureland Buddhism
Ultimate Grace
Total Engagement**

Issue 40 Spring 2020



RUNNING TIDE

Running Tide offers a voice for faith and practice, as well as critical, existential and socially engaged enquiry within the broad framework of Pureland Buddhism. We publish short articles, poetry, pictures, interviews, comment and Buddhist resource materials. Opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Amida Order, Amida Trust, or other associated organisations. Running Tide is distributed by:

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Correspondence and Contributions Submissions are welcome for consideration and can be sent to the Editor, Johnathan Robertson, at jdrobertson87@live.com.

Amida Order & School

The Amida Order and Amida School are a religious order and community, respectively, following the Pureland tradition, established under the auspices of the Amida Trust. In this periodical the letters OAB after a name indicate membership of the Order of Amida Buddha and the letters MAS indicate membership of the Amida School. The Amida School is also referred to as Amida Shu. All Order members are also School members.

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Contents

- **Buddha Walked The Earth** by Dharmavidya
- **Touching the Earth: an Ecodharma Retreat** by David Loy and Johann Robbins
- **This is Home** by Dayamay
- **A Poem** by Tommy Manyo Bradshaw
- **Dependence** by Susthama
- **Dear Earth, what can I see?** by Satyavani
- **What Would Buddha Do?** By Kaspalita



Images:

NASA - Cover	
MarcoRoosink at Pixabay	2
brenkee at Pixabay	3
visiblemantra.org	4
elizadean at Pixabay	5
Stoon at Freeimages.com	6
Skitterphoto at Pixabay	8
Unknown	13
Buntysmum at Pixabay	14
unserekleinemaus at Pixabay	16
DeltaWorks at Pixabay	19
Allphoto Bangkok at Pixabay	21

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Metta to all during this difficult time. This issue will discuss the Earth and our dependence on her.

Much gratitude to Dharmavidya, David Loy, Johann Robbins, Dayamay, Tommy Manyo Bradshaw, Susthama, Satyavani, and Kaspalita, for your contributions.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue and I look forward to future submissions.

Namo Amida Bu,
Johnathan Robertson



Editions and Themes

Spring – Earth

This Spring, as the Earth opens to another season of growth, may we celebrate her and also respond to the challenges of climate crisis.

Summer/Fall– Sangha

With the events of the COVID 19 pandemic, may we reflect on the importance of community.

Submissions are welcome.

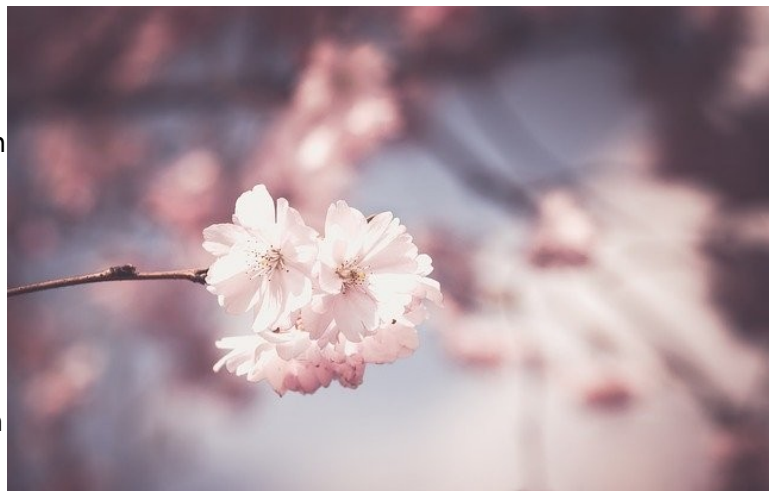
Buddha Walked The Earth

by Dharmavidya

The most iconic image in Buddhism is that of Shakyamuni Buddha touching the Earth at the moment of enlightenment. He reaches down his right hand to call the Earth Mother to witness his attainment of spiritual awakening.

Buddhism is a religion that is close to the Earth. Buddha was born in the open air, his mother gave birth standing, holding the branch of a tree for balance.

He had his first notable spiritual experience as a child sitting under the roseapple tree, in rapt contemplation. This contemplation had itself been prompted by his reflection upon seeing the Earth broken open by his father's ploughshare. This sight caused him grief and he retired to reflect upon the significance. We depend upon the Earth, yet in order to gain our sustenance we violate her in many ways.



When he grew up he saw the Four Sights and resolved to leave home. After crossing the Narnajara River, he abandoned his horse and continued on foot, his feet upon the Earth, step by step.

After a period of ascetic practice he arrived at the "seat of enlightenment". This was a pile of grass, upon the Earth, under a tree, where he sat until insight dawned, whereupon he reached down and touched the Earth.

After that he walked to many parts of India and often taught sitting on the Earth, often in the shade of a tree. The sangha lived a simple life. Their little huts in the bamboo grove gave them a minimal ecological footprint.

Finally, the Buddha came to the end of his life. He died in the open air, upon the Earth, between two trees.

It is sometimes said that since Buddhas are born under trees, enlightened under trees, teach under trees and die under trees, if we were to have no trees left we could have no Buddhas.

Here is a poem.

EARTH

It is enough
to walk on the earth,
water, wind and fire.
See them around,
make them your ground
and you need no longer aspire.

On the night he awakened
he touched the earth,
and she, in joy, bore witness.
Earth, the empty ground of love
in her festive dress.

When he saw the morning star
fire blazed.
Love was kindled.
mischievous devils
stopped in their tracks
and were dazed..

His first steps
out upon the water
he rode white horses.
How it flows
Restoring life to
all the corpses!

When he said his first words,
devas began to sing.
The wind sprang up
in the treetops
whispering nothing, nothing.

The whirling wind leads on the dance,
fans the flames,
ripples the waters.
The ocean bed is deep in trance
supporting the children
of Mara's daughters.

The world is on fire
and the fire is hot -
me, mine, myself...
it's not.

Earth is silent
earth is golden
a boundless field to harrow.
It does not depend.
It has no end.
Find it in the marrow.

Namo Amida Bu
Dharmavidya



Touching the Earth: an Ecodharma Retreat

by David Loy and Johann Robbins

On a sunny July morning a group of meditators is sitting beside a creek in the Rocky Mountains. The teacher gives instructions on paying attention to what is seen, heard and felt, and any feelings of gratitude, joy and love that might arise in response. On such a fine day, in such a lovely place, those feelings occur readily to most of the yogis. A day later, however, the instructions change, focusing on the damage we are doing to our planet: now the emotions that come up are more difficult: grief, guilt, fear and anger....

The ecological crisis is the greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced. It is also the greatest challenge that Buddhism has ever faced. It remains to be seen whether either will respond appropriately, but Buddhist history reveals a flexibility consistent with its emphasis on impermanence and insubstantiality. Today a new and non-sectarian form of environmentally-engaged Buddhism has begun to develop, sometimes called ecobuddhism or ecodharma. At the Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center (RMERC) in Colorado, we are doing our best to find appropriate responses, by experimenting with a variety of retreat forms.

So what is an ecodharma retreat? How would it differ from traditional meditation retreats? The two of us, both founders and teachers at (RMERC), have been developing such retreats for the past few years. We continue to refine the process, and the program this past summer was powerful and transformative. This article is an initial progress report on this new and urgently needed type of Buddhist practice.

Our approach is inspired in part by Joanna Macy's pioneering Work That Reconnects, as well as the Ecodharma Centre in Spain, and also utilizes some of David Loy's book Ecodharma. Essential to the program, however, is that a group of yogis concerned about the environment practice together, in a natural setting. This involves living together 24/7, which creates community, and also relies on deep listening and deep sharing, and being heard by others who are similarly open and vulnerable.

RMERC is an ideal location for such a retreat, being pristine and peaceful, with a wide variety of forest trails, alpine meadows, rocky crags, and a gently flowing creek. At the root of our ecological crisis is that we normally experience ourselves as separate from the natural world, which has become a collection of resources for us to exploit, rather than our home. To realize the deeper truth of our non-separation, direct contact with nature is very important. It is difficult to realize your intimacy with something, and love for it, while staying away from it.

In fact, we have a good model: the Buddha himself, whose solitary meditations culminated in his awakening under a tree, next to a river. Afterwards he was challenged by Mara: “who verifies your enlightenment?” The Buddha touched the ground he sat upon: “The earth is my witness.”



What might happen if we practiced in the way that he did? RMERC’s wild setting offers the supportive and nonjudgmental context needed to make profound transformation possible. Meditating in nature leads to increasing realization that the Earth is acting through us, as us. Empowered by something greater than ourselves, we can become part of the Earth’s immune system.

Our ecodharma retreat last summer was eight days. Fortunately the weather stayed warm and mostly dry and we could practice outdoors as much as we wanted, which was most of the time. The daily schedule, almost all in noble silence, usually included meditation instruction, sitting meditation, hiking meditation, open practice periods, a campfire dharma talk, and a small group breakout session for sharing and interpersonal exercises. The specific practices varied: emphasis the first morning was on sensory awareness of the natural world. Instead of looking within – for example, concentrating on the breath– the focus was on mindful hearing, seeing, and bodily sensing while walking on forest paths or sitting under trees.

On the first afternoon there was a circle when everyone shared their hopes and intentions for the retreat. This began to build supportive relationships among the participants, which became more important as the process developed.

Dharma talks were offered in the evenings, around the camp fire. Following the example of Joanna Macy's spiral process, the initial talk was about gratitude: that being thankful is not just something we occasionally feel, but a transformative practice to be cultivated, which nurtures the ability, willingness and courage to work for the healing of our relationship with the natural world.

Instructions the next day supplemented bare sensory awareness with appreciation of nature. People found a spot that attracted them – maybe a tree or flower, or a rock by the creek. They quietly meditated on it and with it, perhaps touching it, expressing out loud or to themselves the positive feelings that emerged, such as affection, thankfulness, and enjoyment or joy. Attention creates connection, connection leads to caring, and caring to a simple, spontaneous form of metta practice: may this flower be well, may all of us be well together! The afternoon involved a pair exercise, with each person taking turns to repeatedly ask the other: "Tell me something you feel grateful for."

These gratitude practices served to ground us for the difficult work that followed.

The next few days were devoted to becoming more aware of the impact of the ecological crisis, with emphasis on our personal emotional responses to that realization. The urgency of addressing global heating can distract us from the fact that the climate emergency is only the tip of an iceberg that includes many other interconnected issues, such as a species extinction event (better called an "extermination event"); toxins in the water, air, earth, and our own bodies; widespread plastic pollution; soil degradation (half of all agricultural topsoil has eroded away during the last century); radioactive contamination; overpopulation... the list is long.

And to all that must be added social justice concerns regarding racism and ethnicity, neocolonialism, gender and class, always remembering that ecological degradation is affecting some people – most of them poor and/or colored – much more than others. In sum, our now-global civilization has lost its way, and converting to renewal sources of energy, essential though that is, will not be enough to fix what has gone wrong.

It's quite understandable that we don't want to think about such disturbing issues, but of course that's not the response needed. Those who sign up for an ecodharma retreat have at least some awareness of our predicament, but that does not mean they fully feel what it actually means. Most of us have repressed such feelings, to a greater or lesser extent, as a way of coping with the cognitive dissonance. Along with almost everyone

else, we ignore what we know or suspect to be true, and end up living in a delusive and deadened world, each of us reinforcing the collective denial. But we can also help each other overcome that denial and get in touch with our repressed grief and other emotions.

Grief is so uncomfortable that we consciously and unconsciously flee from it. We argue about facts or strategies, or become angry at those whom we identify as responsible for the mess we're in. We seek grounds for hope and, when hope fails us, we fall into despair—a future-preoccupied dualistic way of thinking, which evades what is happening right here and now. Ironically, despair can be a relief: if there's no hope, there's no need for me to do anything. But embracing despair is not the same as feeling our grief, which is much more difficult to do.

We addressed this with body-focused guided meditations that used news items, poems, personal stories, and visualizations, each clearly describing an aspect of the eco-crisis. Each reading was followed by a period of silence, with encouragements to stay in touch with what the body was feeling. Later, after meditating in nature by themselves, people shared what was happening with them in the small groups. For this process the developing sense of community, especially the interpersonal trust, became very important. The vulnerability that others showed helped each of us open up to our own deepest feelings, leaving everyone emotionally raw.

The climax of the retreat was a solo of a day and a half, when each person went off to find their own wild spot, with a tent and sleeping bag. The intention was to deepen their relationship with the Earth, by grounding themselves more firmly in both the love and concern they felt, and the dark and difficult side of the destruction we are all part of. People found their own way to communicate with the land, plants and animals around them. Some people fasted. A few stayed up all night, listening to what the darkness had to offer.

Afterwards we rejoined and shared what had happened, often with tears or laughter—and sometimes both. The solitude helped the week's experiences integrate in a way that became empowering, giving people a greater capacity to bear what is happening, thus enabling them to become more engaged, in mindful response to our predicament. Feeling and enduring our grief and fear can be liberative, but that is not the end of the process. Once a deep acceptance of our emotions begins, changing how we actually live in the world becomes possible, perhaps inevitable. Our fear and grief -- which arise from our love and care for the Earth -- transform into commitment, our self-righteousness into generosity, and our anger into determination.

The final talks and discussions were about the ecosattva path. Ecosattvas, like all bodhisattvas, have a double practice. They continue to work on their own individual awakening, and that personal transformation works to ground their engagement with the ecological and social crises of our time. “Form is emptiness” means that nothing is lacking right now, but that perspective is incomplete without “emptiness is form”: as we let go of our egos and begin to realize our true formless nature, compassion arises and we are naturally motivated to respond. The path unfolds in different directions according to what each person feels authentically called to do.

In the context of don’t-know-mind—the mystery of not knowing what is possible—this double practice enables us to act without attachment to results. Yes, the future may look grim, but regardless of what happens, our task is to continue to do the best we can, living fully in this moment, without knowing if our efforts will make any difference whatsoever in the future. Have we already passed ecological tipping points, and civilization as we know it—perhaps even our species—is doomed? Maybe what we are doing is hospice work. We don’t know, but while that possibility is painful, it is ultimately okay. We don’t know if what we do is important, yet it’s vitally important for us to do it.

Responding appropriately right here and now is a path beyond hope and despair, but requires courage: to face what we fear, and then to act on it.

Of course, ours is not the only possible format for an ecodharma retreat, and we will undoubtedly continue to refine and improve it (next summer’s program will be ten days). While the retreat ended with some closure, it also initiated transformational processes that continue and deepen. The internal work of personal healing and awakening supports one’s commitment to engage, which then calls forth new levels of internal growth to support it. As our actions become expressions of unconditional compassion, rather than fear of what may happen, they do not require particular outcomes to be nourishing. Yes, we want our efforts to be effective, but becoming a manifestation of love, wisdom and generosity is its own reward—as well as our free gift to each other and to the Earth, which is not only our home but our mother.

Johann Robbins and David Loy are two of the founders of the new Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center (www.rmerc.org), and Johann is the Executive Director. He is also the founder and director of Impermanent Sangha Retreats: <https://www.impermanentsangha.com>.

David Loy’s most recent book is *Ecodharma: Buddhist teachings for the ecological crisis*. His website is www.davidloy.org.

This is Home

by Dayamay

It's easy to forget what we receive from the Earth. So much we take and so much we take for granted. A ball of molten rock hurtling through space at up to 72,000 miles per hour. That's fast enough to travel from here to the moon in less than 90 minutes, and yet we move freely on the surface as if we were static. Do we ever really consider the scale of the miracle that is our home, where we live, that holds us, nourishes us, sustains us, protects us?

The Gaia principle suggests that the Earth lives and breathes just as we do. Why not? It gave birth to us. As my relationship with nature deepens and it shows me my fragility, my vulnerability, my inner turmoil and then my inner beauty, it is difficult to imagine that it is not alive. Mother Earth provides for her children. If we are awake and receptive to what she is offering we can see that it is not just our physical needs that are being met, but our spiritual and psychological ones as well. In my darkest moments I can take refuge in nature and be reconciled with the deepest, most wounded parts of me as if they were old friends. From the rawness and coldness of the soil, to the sweet melodies of the wildlife and the soothing energies of the trees, she is present and responsive for whatever arises in me. She marks the point in space-time where the four elements and the disparate aspects of me coincide. The more I look, the more I can see that these two are not separate from one another, but feed into each other as part of a complex relationship which forms the basis for all of my experiences. The Earth is the center of my Universe.

I remember my time at Eleusis in France with great joy. This was where I spent much of my initial period of postulancy. One of the most important parts of my training and experiences in general there was the magical energy of nature that underpins the mysterious ambience of the place, it took my breath away from the minute I arrived. The sound of late-night crickets welcoming and encouraging, cutting through my uncertainty and anxiety and filling me with excitement and happiness and a palpable sense of union with the Earth as a meeting place for spiritual beings in search of eternal truth. I have never felt so at home so quickly anywhere in my life. In the year that I spent there my understanding and appreciation of nature as a fundamental spiritual component grew immensely. I spent five days saying Nembutsu there, alone with the birds and the sun, I set the intention that was to propel me into a deeper way of being in the world. I began to "grow roots", the roots that have enabled me to sway with the wind like a tree, enjoying the benefits of the sun, growing through the turbulent storms and withstanding the trials and tribulations of the religious life.

Climate Change Looms.

Since then the issue of Climate Change has become more urgent, more apparent and very difficult to ignore. Are we alive at a time where we may well witness the death of a planet and the end of our species? All the evidence seems to suggest so. The reality of the effects of Climate Change are not something that is easy for people to hear. Denial is a very powerful thing, the mind struggling to suppress difficult and painful truths, a kind of confusion can set in, compounding the problem and shutting the door to reason. I spoke to a man today who was complaining about the constant heavy rain and resulting floods. "A load of old crap all this climate change nonsense, it was like this when I was a kid." and in the next breath, "You know what the cause is don't you? The Russians and the Chinese messing about with the weather, they've been doing it for years". This is the kind of mentality that can take hold when reality is too hard to accept. Desperate denial.



It's possible that we have come too far to turn back now. Too much damage done and not enough awareness or willingness to change. This pleasure haven paradise may well be transformed into a living hell. If so we have a great responsibility as Buddhists and spiritual practitioners. We may have to help the population of the planet to make peace with a terrible grief. The loss of our planet, our lives and the future of Mankind.

Namo Amida Bu!

But I want to end on a more positive note, to celebrate everything that I do and have received from this incredible world.

As I write I am on the Malvern Hills. If you ever needed an example of the raw power of nature, take a walk up here. Feel the dynamic fluctuations of the world, the weather systems, the wonderfully diverse spectrum of life forms and the sheer energy that surges and flows through the heart of this planet.

As I turn a corner to the sight of another breathtaking scene, the wind cuts in, driving light rain into my face, as if it had been holding its breath, waiting for the right moment to demonstrate its power, and my frailty in comparison. Another time it will be beautiful warm, nourishing sunshine that energises my body and touches something deeper than I can explain. Every experience is unique and profound. This is the landscape of life and the culmination of everything that we were made for. This is home.

Namo Amida Bu(:

A Poem

by Tommy Manyo Bradshaw

When I sit in a serene state at a shrine or some other sacred space

Namu Amida Butsu

When I walk through a beautiful grove of trees

Namu Amida Butsu

When I celebrate an excellent score on an assignment or exam

Namu Amida Butsu

When I receive a parcel in the mail a few days early

Namu Amida Butsu

When I hear from a family member or friend that I have mixed feelings towards

Namu Amida Butsu

When I crack an egg but shell falls into the pan

Namu Amida Butsu

When I feel burdened with exhaustion, plagued by fatigue

Namu Amida Butsu

When I feel numb to the constant horror and tragedy found throughout all forms of media

Namu Amida Butsu

When I feel anger or agitation arise from pinching myself while putting on a mask

Namu Amida Butsu

When I take a centering breath, calling to mind that this too shall pass

Namu Amida Butsu

Wherever we are, whatever has been presented to us by the causes and conditions of life, we can always stop, take a centering breath and bring forth the name of Buddha.

Namu Amida Butsu!



Tommy Manyo Bradshaw is currently in the lay minister training program of the Bright Dawn Center of Oneness Buddhism. He is also a priest with the Augustinians of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and writes for the *Jeweled Tree* blog along with Johnathan Robertson.

Dependence

by Susthama

One of the key teachings in Buddhism is called dependent origination. It broadly explains how everything we do has consequences and all that arises depends on other conditions. From the smallest creature to the entire human race, everything has an impact whether it be psychological or physical. If we do something we know is shameful then we will probably experience feeling guilty. If we plant a sapling then over time it will grow into a tree. Sometimes we can see why and where things have come from and sometimes we can't because it involves a long and complicated process. Another way of putting this is to say that one thing leads to another and if we trace back and unravel the process, then we will be able to see most of the conditions involved. We can see this happening on many levels in immediate ways as well as more distant and indirect ones. The outcomes of one's actions depend on a wide range of conditions. If we know what kind of outcome we would like then we can create the best conditions possible to make it happen, however, this does not mean that it will happen.

We are all in the same boat. Life depends on certain conditions. Birth depends on two, sometimes more, people over whom we have no control. What we think, how we see things, and what we do is largely dependent on factors outside of our control. Our lives are governed by values that have been instilled in us from an early age and often go unchallenged until something or someone comes along and forces us to stop and reflect. Just like the Buddha did to Angulimala. *Anguli* means finger and *mala* means necklace. He was a murderer and thief and after killing his victim he would cut off a victory finger and add it to his necklace and so he was given this name. On one occasion, Angulimala was said to be in the area where the Buddha was doing his alms round and many people were worried for the Buddha. The Buddha carried on, knowing full well that his path might cross Angulimala's. When they met, Angulimala was surprised that he couldn't catch up with the Buddha, who was walking some steps ahead of him. He was even more surprised when the Buddha talked to him and said, "I have stopped and so too must you." The Buddha didn't mean retreating and isolating away in the same way that our governments have forced us to stop. The Buddha meant that he had stopped being self-centred. He stopped thinking and acting in ways that would be for his benefit only. He found a way to live that would enable others to thrive and in return he benefitted. It is said that Angulimala stopped his murderous tendency and restrained himself. He was a changed man, however, that didn't stop people from hating or fearing him. He had to accept that he couldn't control how people saw him and so wherever he went he had to bear the fact that he wasn't welcome or given any offerings. He had to

endure the consequences of being a murderer and thief, something that most people could not forgive easily.

Similarly, even if everyone on this planet were to stop being selfish and put the environment first, we would still have to live with the fact that the planet is warming at an accelerated rate causing huge sheets of ice to melt in the Antarctic. Even as many cities are temporarily forced to stop normal activities and the air is becoming cleaner we must endure the consequences of global warming.

A global pandemic and climate change are two of the greatest threats to humanity according to the United Nations and they also happen to be examples of dukkha and dependent origination. When we look at the causes and conditions for this current global pandemic there is hard evidence it is because of the demand for meat. Humans have successfully created stressful conditions to produce more



from less, and one of the results is that a new kind of virus has found its way into humans. This virus depends on its host to reproduce and spread, just as we are dependent on the planet for all its resources; oxygen, rain, sun, and so on. It is a dependency that runs in one direction. The Earth does not depend on us. It was around before human life and it will probably be around long after we have wiped ourselves out. If the human race becomes decimated by the very activity that created great civilisations, the planet will carry on in its own way. We don't really know very much about what is good for our planet. We think in terms of what is good for us. Climate activists who campaign for the environment are not campaigning for the Earth's sake but for the sake of all of us who depend on the planet. Climate breakdown and the coronavirus outbreak are causing much distress and anxiety. Can their community endure another flooding? Will they or family and friends get the disease and die, will they have enough money to cover their bills, will they have a house or job after all this is over and done with? All this is dukkha and dependent on conditions that we have created.

This pandemic is teaching us how connected we really are. Our disconnection to the consequences of our actions has created a culture of greed and arrogance but Mother

Nature has found a way to stop us. We are now forced to see that we are not as disconnected and separate as we think we are. We are intertwined in so many ways, and we are beginning to see just how much the economy, health, social justice, education, and the environment are not separate issues that need to be tackled separately.

Religion comes from the latin word *religare* which means to bind. The Buddha was a religious person who was deeply bound to the Dharma and taught people to take refuge in it. Taking refuge is about connecting with the Dharma. We open ourselves to something that is not me and we form a relationship with it. Relationship also comes from the latin root *referee* which means to bring back and restore. Buddhists take refuge and restore a sense of the good. What is good for one person is good for everybody. In practice, Buddhists are restoring a connection with love, joy, and wholesome passion. In a world that is changing so fast that it feels as if the rug is being pulled out from under our feet we need something worthy to attach ourselves to in order to help us through this challenging time and make things better and not worse. It is a time for reaching out selflessly. Like the Buddha, and Angulimala, we need to stop.

It is very difficult for us to put something else in the centre of our lives. We place human life and activity above everything else. We exploit and take what we need thoughtlessly. If we were able to think about how it is for all the animals to be eaten, we would probably stop these cruel, harmful and polluting ways. How would life look like if we treated the microorganisms, plants, insects, and animals upon which we depend with respect and appreciation? Would we have been forced to stop? I think not.

Buddhism is a religion that places the Dharma at the centre of one's life. The Dharma teaches us that the best thing we can do is to stop our greed, hate and delusion from driving our every action. As Jiyou Kennett once said, 'The Dharma lacks for nothing and yet needs something.' It needs a vehicle or an instrument through which others can see, feel, and understand wisdom and compassion. It needs you and me to be carriers and to transmit its light to others. As we take refuge, we are able to relate to others in a more respectful way. We may not know in full how to go forward and create a better society but at a time when the impossible is happening, there is no better time to stop. Even if the only thing we can do is to restrain from acting in greedy, hateful, and deluded ways, then we must work hard to practice that.

Dear Earth, what can I see?

By Satyavani

I see our vegetable patch, through my office window. There are our month-old seedlings – courgettes, kale, cauliflower, cucumber, squash. Ruffled green sprigs of potato leaves have poked their way up through the earth. There is flimsy lettuce, just-germinated chard, and a self-seeded marigold which has been socking us in the eye with luminous orange flowers for weeks.

A few nights ago you sent us some heavy weather, dear Earth. The wind howled, and I sat inside worrying for our seedlings. In the morning one courgette plant was snapped in two, and that was all. It seemed miraculous.

We are all weathering some heavy weather right now. Across the globe, a virus is snapping people in half. The collateral damage is massive and we are still at the beginning. As usual, those who are already vulnerable will suffer more. Our friends who have lived a long time. Our friends whose bodies are already weak. Our friends in refugee camps, in prisons, in countries with weak healthcare, in villages where there isn't enough to eat.

We are getting an early taste of how it will be when your systems break down, darling Earth. When the thick blanket of carbon dioxide raises your temperature by just two degrees more. When extreme weather gets more extreme, more lethal. When we begin to forget all the species we have lost. When empty supermarket shelves become the new normal. When we can no longer keep our children safe.

How is it possible to face this great suffering? How is it possible to live with our fear, our grief, our rage, our hopelessness, without it overwhelming us? How can we prepare for the heavy dark clouds on the horizon?

My grey stone Buddha sits on my windowsill, just where I can see him. He knows all about the foolishness of the human race, and he doesn't despair of us. He holds stillness in his body as if it were a flower. He watches it all unfold and his compassion is unbroken.

Don't forget to water your seedlings, he says to me. The bird seed needs topping up – look, a goldfinch is waiting. When you go through to make yourself a cup of tea, don't forget to pause and stroke your dogs. Ralph is dreaming, maybe of rabbits, and little squeaks escape him as his legs judder. As he feels my hand on his flanks he sighs, stretches, and settles.



Sometimes the storms will break those around us, or leave us with wounds that never heal. When this happens, the Buddha is there to console us. Sometimes seedlings survive storms, and the whipping wind strengthens their stems, and they grow stronger than before. When this happens, the Buddha is there to encourage us. Sometimes storms bring new seeds, and astonishingly beautiful new life. When this happens, the Buddha is there to celebrate with us.

There will be tragedies, and there will be miracles, dear Earth. Right now, a pigeon is waddling between the vegetable plants, finding tasty things to eat. The white splash around his neck and the blush at his chest are quite wonderful.

Love,

Satya

What Would Buddha Do?

by Kaspalita

In the first few weeks of the COVID 19-lockdown images of nature flourishing and wild animals returning to towns and cities went viral on social media. Some of these, like the mountain goats in Llandudno, were one hundred percent true. Some of these, like the images of dolphins in Venice, were completely false.

The speed at which these images spread and became global phenomena speaks to the hope in many people's hearts: a hope that we can return to a world where there is a rich diversity of animals thriving and plants flourishing.

Skies clear of contrails and cities free of air pollution have also bought hope. Daily carbon emissions have fallen by 17%. Whilst this is the biggest drop in emissions since the second World War it will have "a negligible impact on the Paris agreement" according to Corinne Le Quéré, from the University of East Anglia¹.

Paying attention to the colours of my mood, I notice hope appearing as I read positive stories like the account of the first wild storks being hatched in the UK today, and hope fading as I read stories of extinction and loss. Sometimes the possibility of positive change seems impossible.

For many of us when we give our attention to the many things that we can't control it can be easy to fall into hopelessness and despair. When we give our attention to things that we can influence or control and take action, good states of mind tend to follow.

This tendency to feel better when we can do something is useful to notice, and can support us to take positive action. It may also speak to some vestige of 'faith by good works': the belief that we must do something in order to receive the Lord's blessing.

Some accounts of the Buddha suggest that the Buddha can see how the seeds of both negative and positive karma will come to fruition in the future. I might have some basic understanding of cause and effect in my own life, but even there the causes and conditions are so complex that I can never really know the outcome of my actions. And on a global scale? The effects of my actions are impossible to predict.

What do I take from the Buddha? On the one hand an invitation to trust that when I sow good seeds they will flower somewhere, even if it is beyond my sight, and on the other hand, that regardless of any flowering it is good to do good for its own sake.

A person whose heart is full of faith naturally and spontaneously responds with love to whatever is in front of them. There is no thought for particular outcomes and no clinging to expectations, just a deep trust that being loving is enough.

In this I am reminded of Dharmavidya's comment that he is a 'happy pessimist.' I don't know if my wishes for the planet will come true. I hope they do, and I suspect that they might not. Yet even within that glass-half-empty view I can sometimes discover a heart full of faith, trusting that I am loved by the Buddhas in the midst of all of this, that the Buddhas are always planting lotus seeds, and that I can occasionally join them.



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