

# **BAM!**

**Lion's Roar:  
Speaking up in a Troubled World**



# Buddhist Action Month: June 2021

## Introduction

As Buddhists we are called upon to alleviate suffering. We can do this through directly offering Buddhist practice and teachings, through maintaining our own practice, and through directly addressing the causes of suffering in the world.

There are many troubles in the world. Much of the world lives in poverty. There is violence against individuals and against groups of people. The climate crisis continues to unfold causing extreme weather events. We are destroying habitats. We are in the midst of a global pandemic.

Buddhist Action Month invites you to take personal action or to create a group event or action in response to the suffering in the world. In the past people have taken an extra personal precept during the month of June, or organised a talk at their Buddhist centre on a specific issue, or gone out into the world as a group to take action like ecosystem restoration or demonstrations on particular issues.

Buddhist Action Month encourages us to look to the world and take positive action.

Buddhist Action Month was created as Buddhist Action Day in 2012 by the Network of Buddhist Organisations in the UK, and now groups and individuals take part across the whole planet.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the committee of the Network of Buddhist Organisations who welcomed me taking on BAM on their behalf in 2019 and have supported me since then.

Thanks to the European Buddhist Union for their support this year, particularly to Jamie Cresswell, a vice president of the EBU.

Thanks to Olivia, Mikey and Les for their ideas and suggestions, many of which appear in this handbook. Thanks to Rehena Harilall for co-writing the section *What Should I Think About Before Speaking Out*, and to Nick for writing *Oil Drilling in the Okavango*. Thanks to Wendy Har for creating the *Green Buddhist Action Days* invitation. Thanks to Trudy for her support. Thanks to Satya for proof-reading. Any remaining errors, omissions etc. are mine.

Kaspa Thompson, 4th March 2020



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## 2021 Theme

The theme for BAM 2021 is: **Lion's Roar: Speaking up in a Troubled World**

Speaking up might look like writing to your government representative, it might look like signing a petition, it might look like sitting in the road protesting, it might be speaking up locally by helping at a food bank or befriending a neighbour, it might be speaking up for living beings through actions like changing your diet or your bank/saving accounts, or it might be speaking up for those whose voices aren't heard.

A Buddha understands causes and conditions. They understand how thoughts and actions in the past lead to consequences in the future. A Buddha knows the capacity of different people to hear the truth and they speak to each of them in just the right way. When a Buddha awakens beings through speaking the truth this is known as their lion's roar.

A Buddha roars the lion's roar when they speak truth, with confidence and in a way that inspires others. How can we do the same?

In this handbook you'll find suggestions and inspiration for speaking up on a local, national and international level.



## BAM Online Events

### Save the date

#### **April 14th 1900 - 1200 BST Ideas and Inspiration: How we speak up as Buddhists**

A sharing and listening space as we approach Buddhist Action Month

#### **June 16th 1900 - 2000 BST BAM Check-in**

What action are we taking, and how are we doing? A sharing and listening space

Zoom invite coming soon. Check the [BAM calendar](#) or sign up to the [BAM mailing list](#) or the [eco-dharma mailing list](#) to receive joining details.

## Buddhist Practice and Buddhist Action Month

### The Benefits of Compassion

When the Buddha described the four immeasurables (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) he said that cultivating compassion in this lifetime creates the conditions for one to be born into a heavenly realm in the next lifetime.

Some Buddhists understand this literally: that developing the attitude of compassion and acting in compassionate ways leads to a heavenly realm after death. Some Buddhists take it as a teaching for this lifetime: that acts of compassion and a compassionate heart lead to heavenly states of mind.

Either way we can see that there is a clear personal benefit from acting compassionately.

The teaching of Indra's Net suggests that all living beings are dependent upon one another. The image of Indra's Net describes a net with a jewel at each knot in the net, and each jewel reflects every other jewel.

Deeply understanding this interconnectedness, we trust that relieving the suffering of one being is good for all beings, and that the personal benefits of our practice of compassion are also beneficial to all beings.



## Living in Alignment

As our awareness of trouble in the world grows, inaction can feel uncomfortable. It becomes like a weight that we carry with us all of the time. Taking compassionate action helps us to put this weight down. Living in alignment with our ideals and precepts creates merit and positive states of mind.

## Speaking Up

### Speaking Up and Practice

Setting an intention to speak up for others, to amplify another's voice, or to act with compassion can act as a mirror for ourselves. How so? We can practise noticing our own thoughts, feelings and reactions that arise when we set the intention for compassionate action.

"You have the courage to do it because you have compassion; because compassion is a powerful energy... You have the courage to say it because you are not afraid of losing anything, because you know that understanding and love is the foundation of happiness. But if you have fear of losing your status, your position, you will not have the courage to do it."

Thich Nhat Hanh, quoted in an [article in The Ecologist](#)

Pausing before taking action can reveal our attachments and can show us where the three poisons (greed, ill-will and ignorance) have taken root. Perhaps we are attached to a particular way of being seen, or to having a comfortable life, or to avoiding conflict.

If we can become friends with these responses we can begin the process of letting them go, which moves us in the direction of pure compassion.

Practising in this way we might also notice the seeds of compassion and loving kindness, which we can water and support to flourish.

Our Buddhist traditions are rich in the practices and resources that can help us do this.

### Speaking Up and Harmony

A common fear when speaking up is that we will create conflict or disharmony. This is an important fear to pay attention to. Sometimes it is telling us something important about the current situation - perhaps that we should choose our words carefully. Sometimes this fear has nothing to do with the current situation and is something from the past rearing its head.



The right amount of disharmony can lead to positive change. Too much can lead to things breaking down. Sometimes things breaking down can be negative, and sometimes new and more wholesome conditions follow things breaking down.

One useful question to ask is, who am I in harmony with? As we cultivate intentions for well-being in the whole world, and come into harmony with the whole world, we might find ourselves in disharmony with smaller groups around us, but anchoring ourselves in a deep wish for the wellbeing of the whole world can bring us the confidence to speak up.

## Listening to Many Voices

When we are working with a group, or within a community, it's important to pay attention to the different responses and feelings of the whole community. Can we bring the spirit of loving kindness as we approach all of the different voices around us? In preparation for BAM we might create an event that brings different voices together to resource us to take wise action, or we might organise an event for BAM that facilitates a conversation between different voices?

## What Should I Ask Myself Before Speaking Up?

The act of speaking up is a powerful one. To make sure that we are speaking wisely and mindfully there are a number of things we can ask ourselves before speaking up.

### **What is my intent and impact?**

Why am I wanting to do this? How does it serve me? What impact will it have? Am I hoping for a particular change? Or to raise awareness? Or to create connections or relationships?

### **Where am I speaking from?**

Sometimes we are motivated by genuine compassion for all. Sometimes hiding in the shadow of our compassion can be other motivations that affect how we speak. It's important to look deeply inside ourselves and check where we are speaking from. Do I want to look good? Do I want to fix something because I can't hold my own reactions and feelings?

### **Am I privileged?**

Am I part of a group that doesn't feel the direct impact of this issue? In which case it's important to know if and how I contribute to the issue I am speaking for. For example, as a white person speaking about racism, it's important for me to find and understand my own racist tendencies and beliefs.

If I am part of a group that doesn't feel the direct impact, how would it be to speak up and not be impacted by the speaking up? Am I going to speak up and walk away and leave the consequences for others?



### **Have I done my research?**

How much do I know about the issue I want to speak up about? Have I just listened to one voice, or have I heard from many voices? Who does it affect and how?

### **Should I speak up or amplify another voice?**

Sometimes it is important to speak up, and sometimes it is more important to use your power to support another's voice to be heard. Is there someone directly impacted by this issue you can support to speak up? Can you join your voices together, using the power of your position and the value of their lived experience?

### **Have I checked with a trusted friend?**

Do I have a friend that knows more about this issue than I do? If so can I get their view on what I am going to say before speaking up?

Written with Reheena Harilall

## Choosing an Issue

There is a great deal of suffering in the world. There are global issues like the pandemic and the climate crisis. There may be very local issues like food and fuel poverty in your neighbourhood, or the loss of special local places. There may be issues that strongly impact on your own life.

How to choose what to address? David R. Loy encourages us to ask three questions: What does the world need? What can I offer? What tugs at my heartstrings?

Finding an answer to all of these questions means that we act with energy and compassion. If we are acting for something that only speaks to one of these it can lead to burn out, or to unskillful actions.

Below you will find a few examples of current issues in the world that you might respond to. This isn't an attempt at an exhaustive list, which would be impossible. You might choose to take action on something highlighted here, or to use this list as a springboard to find an issue that speaks to your heart.

### The Climate & Extinction Crises

In 2019 and 2020 the themes for Buddhist Action Month were focussed on the Earth and the climate crisis. Global average temperatures continue to rise, creating and contributing to extreme weather like the freezing conditions in Texas in February that left many dead.



Early Buddhist practice was deeply intertwined with the natural world. The Buddha and his disciples spent lots of time wandering through the forest and lived lightly on the Earth. One of the first meditations the Buddha taught was the elements practice, raising awareness of our interconnectedness with the Earth.

As Buddhists there are many different ways we can respond to this crisis: from living more lightly on the Earth ourselves, to speaking up to those who have the power to make essential structural changes like discontinuing use of fossil fuels.

[The Buddhist declaration on climate change](#) says:

*Future generations, and the other species that share the biosphere with us, have no voice to ask for our compassion, wisdom, and leadership. We must listen to their silence. We must be their voice, too, and act on their behalf.*

## COP26

COP26 is an international conference on climate change hosted by the United Nations:

“COP refers to the decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)).

In November 2021, the UK will be hosting the 26th annual session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, or “COP26”, in Glasgow.

At the summit, delegates including heads of state, climate experts and negotiators will come together to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change.

As well as the negotiations, there will also be space for countries, international organisations and other delegates to showcase climate action, highlight diverse climate change issues and share knowledge.”

From the [COP26 website](#)

The COP Faiths Task Force say: **The Time is Now – Make COP Count**

“2021 is a crucial year for climate action. The COP26 negotiations in November 2021 represent perhaps the last opportunity to keep the world below 1.5 degrees of warming – an opportunity that must not be missed.

Faith groups have a powerful responsibility to take action on climate, both because of our engagement with the poorest communities around the world who are already suffering most, and because the climate crisis is an existential threat. It affects humanity at the deepest level, raising profound questions about our relationship with the living world. We must all try to find the moral courage to confront these questions, and to transform ourselves and our society...



...We have heard the prophetic voices of the school strikers and others within and beyond our faith communities, and we are responding to their calls.

... As representatives of UK faith communities we are calling upon government, faith leaders and faith communities to put these messages at the heart of their response to the climate crisis.”

During Buddhist Action Month, how can you and your group resource yourselves to make your voice heard at the time of COP 26?

## Social Justice Issues

The summer of 2020 saw waves of Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the US and in the UK. Inspired by that movement many Buddhist groups created space for their members to do the inner work of examining prejudice, beliefs and habit patterns, and asked how those beliefs manifested in their groups and centers.

Your Buddhist group may have an existing initiative that you can join, or you could join events run by non tradition specific groups like [Buddhists Across Traditions](#).

“Making the World a Fairer Place”

The [Amnesty International](#) website has a list of issues and the action you can take in response. You might explore these issues and ask, what is a Buddhist response?

### Oil drilling in the Okavango: delusion on steroids

I don't know when I first became aware of the Okavango Delta. Last year I watched the National Geographic film 'Into the Okavango' but I sense this place speaks from a deeper place within me. Perhaps it is a place we all know as DNA evidence traces all living humans to hunter gatherer inhabitants of the region. Their direct descendants, the San, still live there as hunter gatherers entwined in the magical abundance of this place alongside numerous other groups. It is a truly magical place. Every year the delta floods up to 15,000 square kilometers, and like a heartbeat charges water into the Kalahari desert providing for a million people and the largest populations of wildlife in Africa.

The maze of impenetrable waterways are home to unique Duga lions, leopards, black and white rhinoceros, giraffe, zebra, impala, cheetah, crocodile, baboon, more than 400 species of bird and the largest remaining population of elephants on the planet... Its abundance is like the very song of life.



With ears to hear this song human beings might, as the Buddha did, touch the earth and in that moment call upon the wisdom embodied there as witness to our place in this universe. Instead there is the sound of nearby oil drilling. A company called ReconAfrica has licences to explore for oil in an area larger than Holland spanning Namibia and Botswana. This licence abuts 170 miles of the main river that feeds the Okavango delta and runs right up to the delta itself, a protected UNESCO World Heritage site. ReconAfrica state there could be 120 billion barrels of oil in the area they have licenced, which would make it the largest onshore oil discovery for years.

Oil exploration inevitably causes pollution and the effects on this unspeakably precious ecosystem and people who depend on it would be catastrophic. The delta has no drainage: its water sinks into the desert. There is nowhere for pollutants to be diluted or released. When the world has to reduce its CO2 emissions by more than 7% a year this decade in order to keep within the limits of the Paris Climate Accord, and as more and more countries are transitioning to net zero emissions, the project is financial, environmental and existential insanity.

This is a project that must be stopped in order to protect the human and non human life that depends on the delta and all future life on this planet. It is a project that is emblematic of a fossil fuel scramble for Africa, with companies trying to milk the continent for profits to funnel off to investors and tax havens.

There are activists in Namibia and Botswana and across the world coming together to challenge this project. Drilling has started but oil production has not yet begun.

Please complete this form <https://tinyurl.com/SaveOkavango> for further information or email [ReConOut@pm.me](mailto:ReConOut@pm.me)

## Ways to Take Action

You can act as an individual, choosing to make some personal lifestyle change, or to speak up about a specific issue, or you can come together with others as a group. Working with others on a BAM event or action is a great opportunity to make friends, build sangha, and do something meaningful.

### Branding your event BAM and the five precepts

If you would like to use the Buddhist Action Month name and logo for your event, please make sure that your event is in line with Buddhist principles and ethics. Ask yourself, is this action in line with the five precepts? You can download the BAM logo from [www.nbo.org/bam2021](http://www.nbo.org/bam2021)



## European Day of Action

On 5th June I invite Buddhists from all over Europe to practise in public and dedicate their practice to a cause close to their heart. Download the [information pack](#) for more detail

## Green Buddhist Action Days

The Swedish Buddhist Community invites us to join them in committing to at least one vegetarian or vegan day per month. [Download their invitation now.](#)

## Get Involved in Existing Campaigns or Groups

There are groups which already integrate speaking up, taking action and Buddhism. Check out if these have a presence in your local area, or if there is a way of connecting with them online. Some of these groups include Buddhists of all traditions:

[Extinction Rebellion Buddhists](#)

[International Network of Engaged Buddhists](#)

[Buddhist Peace Fellowship](#)

[Buddhists Across Traditions](#)

Some traditions like Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village, or the Zen Peacemakers are known for engaged Buddhism, and some groups have existing sub-groups for engaged work.

## Create a Buddhist sub-group of an existing campaign or group

There are many non-Buddhist campaigns and resources out there. If these appeal, ask yourself what Buddhist engagement with these might look like. It might be joining an existing group, supported by your personal practice. It might be gathering a group of Buddhist friends and asking if you can create a Buddhist response or action within an existing campaign.

## Speaking to Your Government Representative

In the UK, [Hope for the Future](#) support people to speak to their local or national government representative about climate change. Wherever you are in the world, there are likely to be resources online to help you find out who your representative is, and possibly to help with creating letters on specific issues.



## Signing Petitions

If your inbox is anything like mine you receive an invitation to sign something every other day. The amount of need in the world can feel overwhelming, and it can sometimes feel like signing online won't make any difference. And yet there are real results that have happened in the world following successful petitions. In the UK [petitions to parliament](#) that reach 10 000 signatures require a government response, which can include being debated in parliament.

## Group Writing Action

The Extinction Rebellion Interfaith Vigil recently hosted an online action vigil where people came together to share Buddhist practice, went off individually to spend time letter writing or signing petitions, and then came back together to share personal responses with each other. This was a powerful event and a great example of how working as a group can be both more effective and more inspiring than working alone.

## Speaking and Listening Within Your Buddhist Group

Deep listening to one another is both an important preparation to action, and a significant act in and of itself. Can we make space in our communities to speak about the suffering in the world, and to listen with loving kindness to the responses of others?

As Buddhists our own traditions have practices that can resource us to listen in this way, and there are many other ways we can resource ourselves and get support as well. For example, [Insight Dialogue](#) draws on Buddhist practice and teaching to support listening and speaking; and non Buddhist resources include things like [nonviolent communication](#).

## Divesting

Removing your personal money, and your centre/group's money from banks and companies that are harmful to the Earth (through investing in fossil fuels, for example) is a powerful way of taking away support from those industries, and living more closely in line with your ideals.

As well as divesting from harmful industries (or from banks that invest in harmful industries) we can also make a positive choice to invest in a positive way. We can choose to save or spend our money where it will make a positive difference to the world.

Divesting involves changing banks, pension funds or shares to those that do not engage in harmful business. In the case of carbon divestment, this also means changing your electricity supplier to one that offers 100% green energy.

Find out if your bank is funding fossil fuel projects here: <https://switchit.money/>



As well as joining campaigns to ask institutions like universities and art galleries to divest, we can also speak to our Buddhist centres and groups about where their money goes.

## Public Practice

Holding a vigil, or meditating in public and dedicating that meditation to a particular cause is a powerful act. It both raises awareness of the issue and is an act of peace. Seated or walking meditation in public offers and demonstrates a different way of being to the world.

This is especially powerful as a group. In this image below a small group of us came together to hold vigil for the Earth in Worcester city centre. We are maintaining social distancing.



You can find resources to organise your own vigil, individually or as a group, at [www.earthvigil.co.uk](http://www.earthvigil.co.uk).

## What now?

Here are some questions to help you think of your next steps:

Ask yourself do I want to take individual action, or join an existing group, or invite others to join me?

What action do I want to take? What does the world need, what can I offer, and what tugs at my heart?



Who can I share my ideas and enthusiasm with?

What do I need to do now to prepare for action in June?

Email [bam@nbo.org.uk](mailto:bam@nbo.org.uk) and we'll add your event to the [BAM calendar](#)

Email [bam@nbo.org.uk](mailto:bam@nbo.org.uk) if you would like a conversation about BAM 2021, or if you'd like to be involved in facilitating BAM 2022.

Share your events in the [Buddhist Action Month Facebook group](#) or on Twitter with the hashtag #bam2021

Enjoy!



## Resources

Find the BAM logo, the ecodharma network tool kit and audio and video talks here: [Planning and resources](#)

### Buddhism and Social Justice

**Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor** by Layla Saad, 2020

**Awakening Together** by Larry Yang, 2017

**Mindful of Race** by Ruth King, 2018

**Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love and Liberation** by Rev angel Kyodo williams, Lama Rod Owens & Jasmine Syedullah, 2016

**Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha** edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 1989

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### Buddhism and the Climate Crisis

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