

An Integrated Approach to Responding to Environmental Suffering

10 Buddhist Practice Suggestions* summarized by John Bell, Jan 2020

● **Face the truth**

The First Noble Truth asks us to look clearly at suffering. Regarding environmental suffering...

- Imminent catastrophes (sea rise, species loss, communities destroyed, ocean changes)
- Vanishing foundations of human civilization (land, water, food, social stability)
- Inevitable environmental collapse, probable societal dysfunction, possible human extinction

● **Know the causes**

The Second Noble Truth asks us to understand the root sources of suffering, to respond appropriately

- External: racism, patriarchy, and all oppressions; population growth, burning of fossil fuels, extractive economy, industrial agriculture, consumerist culture driven by debt
- Internal: greed, ill-will, delusion; separation, dualistic mind; fear and anxiety about jobs, health, security, poverty, death; generational trauma

● **Cultivate wholeness**

How to keep the big picture in front of us; eyes on the prize of liberation from suffering

- Practice the four Immeasurable Minds (lovingkindness, joy, generosity, equanimity)
- Contemplate unbroken wholeness in a benign universe as reality, our inseparability from nature
- Love the earth, natural world; envision the “more beautiful world our hearts know is possible”

● **Contemplate impermanence**

- “Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away.” -the Buddha; Five Remembrances
- Face our mortality, end of our civilization, of things as they used to be; let go of notions
- Open to preciousness of life;

● **Understand interconnection and intersectionality**

Seeing the interbeing nature of the climate predicament with everything

- Climate crisis intersects with every other issue we care about
- Climate crisis is made up entirely of non-climate crisis elements
- Climate justice is inextricably linked with racial justice
- Climate crisis is karma; healing oppression is healing relations with earth

● **Heal the heart**

Facing the climate catastrophe evokes deep feelings; how to embrace them fully.

- feel the grief, fear, anger, despair, confusion; cry out the grief; shake out fear, etc.
- heal early childhood hurt and trauma, collective trauma, racism, sexism, anti-semitism, classism and other oppressions; uproot feelings of powerlessness
- open to love, connection, oneness, being embedded in the natural world & not alone in cosmos

- **Stay connected**

We cannot heal ourselves or the world's suffering alone. Practice staying close...

- To each other; to our deepest aspirations; build Beloved Community
- To our true home; to the natural world
- To the ultimate dimension, open to dimensions beyond current human understanding

- **Live ethically**

The climate crisis needs us to align our actions to our true nature, individually and collectively

- Five Mindfulness Trainings and Fourteen Mindfulness trainings as guides
- Diligently practice kind speech, non-harming, generosity, true love, wise consuming

- **Begin here now**

Since everything is connected, we can begin where we are, blossom in the life we have been given.

- Stay healthy and balanced; nurture the body
- Care for family and friends and our communities
- Give up pettiness; forgive; cleave to love, including towards ourselves
- Care for part of the world or nature that we love; practice wholeheartedness
- Heal and transcend the small self: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" - MLK Jr.

- **Act courageously, intentionally, mindfully**

"Seeing and acting go together. Otherwise what is the point in seeing." - Ven.Thich Nhat Hanh

- Inspire solidarity based on love and compassion; build alliances across all so-called divisions
- Communicate benefits of a transformed society; see no enemies
- Promote a just transition to a sustainable economy-- inclusive, equitable, and connected
- In ever-larger groups, advocate, disrupt, sacrifice, risk arrest in nonviolent civil disobedience
- Envision and work on one or more of these:
 - mitigation (clean energy, eco-agriculture, green building, carbon capture, Drawdown)
 - adaptation (flood control, firefighting, climate disaster relief work, etc.)
 - resilience (poverty alleviation, migration assistance, family planning, food security, girls' education in developing world, etc.)
 - fundamental systems change (end fossil fuel use, build equitable steady-state economy; revive democracy with Citizens Assemblies & local engagement, dismantle patriarchy, systemic racism and class oppression, etc.)

"Block, Build, Be" – Buddhist Peace Fellowship; meditate, study, act, rest, repeat

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