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)
 - **o** 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

^{*} Acknowledgements. I offer gratitude to numerous teachers who inhabit this summary, in particular, Buddha, Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, Bhikkhu Bodhi, Thanissara, David Loy, Rev. angel Kyoto williams, Paul Hawken, Lyn Fine, Heather Lyn Mann, Charles Eisenstein, Jem Bendell, and folks from Climate Justice Alliance, BPF, Indigenous

Environmental Network, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, Sunrise, and 350.org.