

OzZen Quarterly

Spring 2020



OzZen Quarterly is a publication for and by members of the OzZen community based on the Mid North Coast NSW, Australia as a means of keeping in touch and sharing information. For more information about OzZen please see our website: ordinarymind.com.au.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this second edition of our OzZen Quarterly.

For our Sunday Zoom Zendo session on August 30, Andrew organised some brilliant presenters to speak on the topic of Ecodharma, or the intersection of Zen and active respect for our natural world. Each of those presenters have provided material which is reproduced here. This edition is focused on that same topic.

Once again, members contributed a range of original works and some relevant recommended readings found in other publications. Thank you to everyone who contributed.

Thank you also to everyone who participates and contributes to our regular online sessions. Your ongoing involvement enriches our shared experience. And of course, thank you to Andrew. You continue to facilitate a wonderful shared sense of belonging for our community, and we are grateful.

Jill KW September 2020

LETTER FROM THE TEACHER

ECODHARMA

Introduction

When it comes to facing up to the ecological crisis it sometimes feels like we are all caught in a *collective* self-centred dream or should I say *human-centred dream*. It seems almost impossible for us humans to realise the extent of the catastrophe that is already upon us because most of us don't see it. Literally, to be frank there is precious little coverage in the mass media, we have to start educating ourselves.

Reading chapter one of David Loy's book on Ecodharma makes for sombre reading. Being caught in a self-centred dream we ignore what is going on – we are so caught up in our own lives that we FORGET – the wonder of simply being alive and we forget the species extinctions, the plastics in the oceans and the over-fishing, the chemicals we are ingesting, the acidification of the oceans, the destructive impact of industrial agriculture, freshwater depletion, radioactive pollution, and over-population leading to the conclusion that the ecological crisis cannot be separated from social justice.

Buddhism has always taught interdependence– the ecology of life. But Buddhism has also gotten caught in seeking transcendence from this world like all the other major religions. Zen is all about living in this world – We can no longer practice an exclusivism based on a narrow human-centric viewpoint. All life forms need inclusion. Today's meeting is dedicated to reflecting on this all important dimension – what has now become known as Ecodharma.

GUIDED MEDITATION ON THE INSUBSTANTIALITY OF SELF

“There are so many ways to wake up out of the trance of the separate self which is basic to the trance of the industrial growth society and late capitalism” Joanna Macy: No Self as Good News – YouTube – 3 years ago.

*Colours of the mountain peak
And echoes of the valley stream
All of them as they are
Are nothing other than
My Sakyamuni’s
Voice and appearance.
- Dogen*

The insubstantiality of self

One of the central teachings of Zen is the insubstantiality of self – there is no separate permanent entity that is myself – the personal self comes into being through human conversation. However, western individualistic culture creates the illusion of an egocentric separate self – which is solidified through the central construction in our culture of ownership of land - private property. The illusion that one person can own and possess a portion of this sacred ground we call the earth. We slice it up into little squares and we make money from buying and selling these residences. On the sacred earth that we stole from the original inhabitants of this land. In one sense, ownership is one of the ways people feel a sense of permanence in our culture – blinding us to the fact that we ourselves are impermanent.

Our zazen practice teaches us directly about the insubstantiality of self and our interdependence with the environment and all

beings. This insight will be crucial towards acting in ways to care for life on this planet in all its diverse forms.

Last Wednesday I described the personal self as having three dimensions: what we might call I, the me or myself and social identity. The “I” of awareness, the associated flow of thoughts, feelings, memories that we think of as “me” or “myself” and our social identity – age, occupation, gender, etc. In this meditation we will focus on how our personal self meets the world self and is just as much a part of the world self as is the flower.

Social Identity

So, to begin our meditation – let’s start by letting go of our social identity. We do that by focusing on sensations, feelings. We can’t really feel age, or gender. They are just concepts. However, because we identify with concepts, we can feel hurt if someone insults aspects of our social identity. However, for the purpose of this meditation let’s leave these identities behind us. Let us de-identify from these constructs by just bringing our attention to our direct experience. Right now.

Where in our direct experience can you find gender or age, or occupation or citizenship or ownership for that matter? We sometimes say things like “I feel my age” but when you take away the story all we feel is a flow of sensations. We are a bundle of sensations from the moment we are born to the moment we die.

Can you really feel gender? Now, you may feel hurt if someone insults your identification with a gender, but that hurt feeling is a feeling. Again, gender is a social construction and it’s not a feeling. Zazen in a way reveals our utter nakedness, in the sense of identity. When we are stripped of all our identity - what is there left?

When we focus on our inner self, the me, our most private inner sanctum – the flowing stream of thoughts feelings, images, memories, constantly changing from one moment to the next – notice how we are aware of the presence of the world – how we are always already embedded in a world. This shows us how our inner self is always appearing within the context of something much larger. We can call it the world self or body – this world we experience as our senses – sounds, smells, colours, tastes and the sensation of touch.

Notice how our awareness is aware of both our sense of me, our inner most feelings, and the richness of life all around us. See clearly how we are nonseparated from this world. It is the *same* awareness that hears sounds and feels hurt. Notice how sounds and feelings are all intermingling in the one stream or flow of consciousness. How our personal self is a part of the world – the same as the mountain and the stream. The world self, selfing in the same way that the personal self is selfing from moment to moment. The sounds and feelings are all co-rising – one flowing stream of awareness. Isn't this wonderful? To come back to Dogen's poem:

*Colours of the mountain peak
And echoes of the valley stream
All of them as they are
Are nothing other than
My Sakyamuni's
Voice and appearance.*

The colours of the mountain and the sounds of the stream are all my body. This very body is the body of Buddha and it includes the mountain and rivers and all the countless beings that have their dwelling there are not separate from us. The personal self

is always embedded in this world self – our Buddha Nature. The personal self is part of a much larger stream – the stream of life. The personal self is ultimately a fiction – a necessary fiction which is *seen through* by the very same awareness that constitutes it and brings it into being in the first place. Awakening to this self-realisation is simply seeing the insubstantial nature of the personal self and the interdependence of all life - realising the self-as-world, which is inclusive of all beings.

This mystery of life - exactly this – hearing, smelling, seeing, feeling. There is the me, which is precious, and there is life and we are life. And all life is precious.

Our first precept in Zen is to cherish all life – to hold all of life in reverence. Without life there would be no experiencing anything. Life as it is, the only teacher. We might call Zen a religion of life. This reverence which calls us forth – to be guardians of that which we love – gratitude for being alive is an expression of this love. Ultimately our zen practice teaches us to love life – to love life in all its inclusivity.

This is who we are. Just this. And the love of just this calls forth our care, our tender care “for birds and beasts”, our tender care for all beings – sentient and non-sentient.

We are all expressions of this unique diversity we call life -Each one of us, each one of totally unique in our manifestation from moment to moment. Each leaf on the tree totally unique. From the one tree an infinity number of unique leaves.

The colours of the mountains and the sounds of the valley stream are themselves the sutra - are themselves the teaching – there’s no need to read the sutra, one just hears and sees the sutra. There is nothing hidden in Zen. The precious sacredness of life is

there for all to see and hear. All we have to do is open our hearts, let go of the self-centred dream – we all know this. Not with our heads but with our hearts.

This little OzZen community is part of thousands and thousands of little communities that are all dedicated to opening our hearts, trying to reverse the cycle of catastrophic devastation - from a left-centred, head-centred civilization to one that can embrace the interconnectness and interdependence of the whole of life and Zazen is the opening of the heart.

Andrew Tootell, 30/08/20



Shoes lined up outside our Sawtell Zendo March 2020

WILD TRUST

Musings of an Eco Philosopher

by Andrew Turbill, Bellbottom community Arts & Culture Guide
September 2020

“ ... After so many millennia of being served up an inimical diet of relentless human brutality it is truly a wonder how wild creatures ever feel comfortable around us. But they do, if you promise to be still. Stillness earns you what I'll call “wild trust”...

Try it for yourself. Next time you find yourself with a wild little being situated between you and where you want to go, pull up and acknowledge your physical privilege and this creature's inherent right to share the world with you. Wait for it to relax again in your presence and wonder at the joy of experiencing the simple pleasure of earning ‘wild trust’.”



FIRE AND RAIN – PRACTICING ECOLOGY & ZEN

Phil Pisanu, July 2020

Rainforest Teacher

“Destroying rainforest for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal.” Edward O. Wilson (Harvard Professor) – the patriarch of modern biogeography.

Ecology is essentially the study of the relationships between plants, animals, people, their environment, and the links between these relationships.

The next time you eat a Macadamia nut, think about the Australian rainforests and where they originated millions of years ago. Macadamia trees are cousins of banksias and other plants in the Proteaceae family. Banksias, and most of the plants in the family familiar to us like Grevilleas, love fire. But the family has its origins in the ancient rainforests of Gondwanaland, the super-continent that would eventually spawn South America, Africa, Arabia, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, India, Antarctica, and Australia.

The Macadamia is one of a few Proteaceae genera that stayed in the rainforest. The genera includes seven species in eastern Australia and one each in New Caledonia and Sulawesi. The wild types for the two edible species we now enjoy cling on in small, wild populations in northern NSW and southern Queensland. There are many more commercial hybrids of Macadamia in orchards than wild trees, which are officially threatened with extinction.

How do I know all of this? In many ways, the beginning of my own ecological journey involved studying the reproduction and population dynamics of wild Macadamia trees for my PhD dissertation (many years ago now).

The rainforest held many lessons for me, not just intellectual ones. Rainforests are both beautiful and horrible at the same time. I recall standing in pouring rain, vainly trying to shelter

under a canopy of Tuckeroos, watching my water proof notebook fail, sweating in a pretty much useless raincoat, and swatting mosquitos. During this time of study, I watched an aging hippy in Byron Bay sing a song about humans being 'top of the food chain', but a lot of the time I spent in rainforests felt like I was the food chain.

This adventure included climbing trees to collect pollen from Macadamia flowers, battling through thickets of Lantana and lawyer vine (it clings on and won't let go), tagging and measuring hundreds of seedlings, boots full of bloody leeches and, eventually, developing a tick allergy.

Humans, unlike other animals, have largely managed to remove themselves from nature, but nature remains a powerful force that is in turn beautiful and completely unforgiving. Unfortunately, in the modern world the human has evolved into a force of destruction with a distorted set of economic values and questionable ethics.

Destroying ecosystems is not new. In 2005, Jared Diamond wrote an influential account of the ecological collapse of a number of ancient civilizations. Not all human societies of the past destroyed the natural world but all societies have altered it. Some such as Easter Island and Norse Greenland exploited and deforested the land to such a degree that their human populations themselves collapsed.

As a professional ecologist for more than 20 years I have had the rewards of many small successes, working with smart and dedicated people to restore degraded ecosystems. But as I get closer to the end of my working life I have become deeply saddened by the failure of human society to avert impending ecological disaster. This sadness (and anger) has been a large part of why I have recently taken up Zen. Perhaps a zazen oriented practice can offer an opportunity for renewal and new energy, and support from a new community of people also concerned with the destructive trajectory we are on.

Fire, Destruction and Renewal

“The Australian bush owes its peculiarity, more than anything else, to *Eucalyptus*.” Stephen. J. Pyne, Emeritus Professor, Arizona State University.

Fire and nature have an ancient history. Fire is an elemental force for change, renewal and destruction in natural systems, and humans have a long history of interacting with fire – as victims, as beneficiaries and as agents of change.

Fire has been a part of and shaped the Australian environment for at least 66 million years, from when the continents assumed their modern configuration. There has been considerable debate among scientists and archaeologists about the relative contribution of climate and people to the dynamics of fire worldwide, but it is generally thought that increased evidence of fire in the fossil record from about 2.8 million years ago is linked to human activity. In Australia, a long-term drying trend and the consequent evolution of a fire-loving flora appears to have been reinforced by Aboriginal burning.

Fire strongly shaped the second phase of my professional life. In South Australia, I was both a first responder to bushfires and a fire ecologist. I saw both the destructive and regenerative power of fire first hand. I was privileged to be part of group of ecologists and farmers who successfully used fire to bring rare and endangered plants back from the brink of extinction on Kangaroo Island.

When I moved to the North Coast six years ago I thought I would not experience fire like I had in the past. The subtropical climate and geography have shaped a landscape where fire has been less prevalent for millennia than on drier parts of the continent. I looked forward to renewing my earlier relationship with the tall wet eucalypt forests and rainforests in the region. However, my prediction of the future was way off. As the 2018-19 drought

persisted and conditions slowly became more extreme I thought we might see a bad fire season – little did I know!

In October 2019, I stood in my front yard in Coffs Harbour under an apocalyptic red sky, raining ash and whole, burnt eucalypt leaves onto the lawn. Coincidentally, I trained as an emergency planner in August. I had many years of operational experience but had never worked in an Incident Management Team. At the end of a challenging week long course I thought it might be many years before I got to apply this new knowledge. Again, I couldn't have been further off the mark!

The fires started in northern NSW in early September and in December they were still burning. This season broke all records for fire size and intensity for northern NSW and southern Qld and impacted on the lives of many people. By February, southern parts of NSW had also been impacted, and politicians would repeatedly refer to the unprecedented scale of the fires, while mostly avoiding any reference to climate change.

Drought and fire ash would ultimately promote the flowering of large Gynea Lily in my front yard. These long-lived lily-like plants of the genus *Doryanthes* are unique to eastern Australia, flowering infrequently but producing a spectacular flaming head of flowers on a long spike. The specimen in my yard was much appreciated by myself, my partner and others in the neighbourhood for many months (the birds liked it too).

Unfortunately, and with great sadness, I had to remove the seven metre long and heavy flower spike as gale force winds in July threatened to pull the plant out of the ground, proving again that nothing lasts forever, even something so wondrous.

The impacts of the bushfires on humans are quite tragic but there is another tragedy unfolding. Geological forces, climate dynamics and humans would ultimately reduce the ancient Australian rainforests to small, isolated and mostly moist mountain top sites, many now only found in eastern Australia where we live. These ancient places are home to unique trees,

ferns, fungi, birds and mammals – podocarps, log runners, scrub birds, lyre birds and potoroos to name a few.

Sadly, fire and humans conspired to change these ancient forests forever. As an ecologist and student of Zen I find myself faced with a dilemma – change is inevitable and death is guaranteed, yet in my heart I feel the sadness of loss – the loss of the animals and plants that don't have a voice in human affairs.

In 2012, the preeminent Australian fire researchers Ross Bradstock, Richard Williams and A Malcolm Gill wrote that the 'realpolitik of fire in the first decade of the new century had been shaped by a remarkable level of media scrutiny, fire inquiries and the emergence of large scale litigation concerning management of fires and their effects'. Unfortunately, by the end of the following decade, the worst predictions of scientists and emergency managers of fire catastrophes had also played out.

As an undergraduate student in the 1990s, I was introduced to the idea of 'fire stick farming'. This hypothesis neatly described the use of fire by Aboriginal peoples to shape the landscape for the production of the resources they needed. Cultural fire, as it is now known, is regaining prominence as Australians increasingly search for answers about how to live and thrive on our dry and fire prone continent.

I suspect that for Aboriginal people at least, fire is significant for much more than exploiting resources. Fire also has powerful stories and lore, helping to maintain spiritual and cultural connections to Country. There is no simple solution to the dilemmas we face as a complex society trying to manage fire and other ecological problems in an unpredictable world. However, a mature Australia could learn from First Nations people to foster a deeper connection to land, water and sea.

After all, is a giant Eucalyptus tree on the edge of a rainforest not an expert in zazen? Sitting peacefully and silently on the earth, giving freely to a diversity of beings.

Socially Engaged Zen

Someone asked Nanchan Cong: “What is the meaning of Zen?”

Nanchan answered: “Rain deep in the forest in winter, wind on the plains in spring.”

Nanchan Cong – a sixth generation Chinese Zen ancestor, from Thomas Cleary - Classics of Buddhism and Zen.

In an essay on Dōgen Zenji and ecology, Gary Snyder describes Dōgen as a proto-ecologist due to his deep insights into the way wild nature works. He believes Dōgen not only gained this insight through his practice of zazen but in the time he spent living and walking in the mountains and wild places of China and Japan. Snyder, a Zen Buddhist, ecologist and poet, notes that in ecology all inorganic matter and organic beings interact in the *biosphere*. In Buddhism, this is called ‘all sentient beings’.

Historical Buddhism from Shakyamuni Buddha onwards contains ideas and practices that reflect a reverence for nature and care for all beings, human and non-human. An early Buddhist story, one of many excellent pieces translated in *Dharma Rain Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, describes the meeting between Mahakashyapa and Buddha that discussed forest-dwelling monks. In the Maharatnakuta Sūtra, Buddha states, “A forest dwelling monk must delight in a secluded forest and live in it”. The Buddha goes on to describe the deeds the forest dweller should perform to benefit all sentient beings. This story explicitly links Buddhist practice and living a simple life in nature away from worldly distractions.

Arguably, the world of the ancient practitioners, including the ancestors of Zen from China and Japan, was much different than it is today. At the time when Dōgen was alive in the early 1200s the world population is estimated to have been about 400 million people, in contrast to the 7.8 billion humans on earth today. Not only was the human population comparatively small but most societies were agrarian, prior to the rapid expansion of science,

technology and human populations during the industrial revolution beginning around 1760.

This is not to say that early Zen monks did not witness the destruction and exploitation of nature and the problems associated with humans living in villages, towns and small cities, but the scale and magnitude of the issues now caused by explosive human population growth and advanced technology would have been inconceivable at the time.

Buddhism in modern times, has already begun to evolve new ways of looking at the problems of the world. Prominent teachers from a range of traditions, like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hahn, are showing awareness of and leadership in dealing with the environmental crisis being felt worldwide. Some Western Buddhist teachers, particularly in the USA, have been actively engaged in the environmental movement since the 1950s.

Judith Brett neatly summarises Australia's modern environmental and economic crisis as the 'coal curse'. Australian politicians of all stripes, but particularly from Coalition governments, have failed to even begin to meaningfully address climate change. The current Prime Minister Scott Morrison's political stunt in February 2017 when he brandished a lump of coal in Parliament, starkly illustrates the love affair the political class has with coal and all forms of fossil fuels. That the fossil fuel lobby has distorted Australian democracy for decades is beyond doubt, but the Australian people are also complicit.

Many Australians have selfishly, but perhaps unconsciously, voted for apparent stability, tax cuts and hollow promises of more jobs at the expense of taking a hard look at what sort of society we want for ourselves and for future generations. This is underpinned by Australia's collective obsession with mining, which has fuelled decades of economic prosperity but stifled much creativity and diversification of the Australian economy. This has locked us into a cycle of excessive greenhouse gas emissions through our lack of initiative to develop renewable energy and replace our mining export markets.

There are many challenges for the modern Zen practitioner attempting to apply the lessons of ancient traditions to unprecedented modern problems. Delving into these challenges in detail is the subject of another essay but in facing the risk of despair and burnout Joanna Macy and Christopher Titmuss make the following observation: Since many ecological problems will not be solved in our lifetimes, commitment must be sustained more by equanimity than anxiety.

On the North Coast, we live and work in one of the most beautiful parts of the world in a relatively prosperous and peaceful society. Yet, like everywhere, over-exploitation and the constant pressure for economic growth and development are pushing nature to the edge.

The OzZen community has an opportunity to make a difference, no matter how small. What will we do?

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Thanks to Phil for sharing these thought provoking reflections based on his long career in environmental protection.



Original photograph supplied by Phil

Thanks to Peter for this contribution

THE BACKYARD BUDDHA SUSTAINABILITY REVOLUTION

From even the earliest days of entry, influence and practice in China, Chan or Zen Buddhism, has had a strong and solid history of living very simply and frugally. Also a love of the natural world was very evident in Chan's amazing outpouring of expression in the Arts - Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Gardens, Songs and Music, Tea Ceremony, Flower Arrangement and The Martial Arts such Judo and Aikido... Chan or Zen acquired most of this veneration of the natural world from Taoism ... Notably , during the great Buddhist persecutions in China , Chan was able to survive because of the strong practicing community living frugally off the land around the monasteries ...

Not surprisingly the findings of the great study undertaken by The Club of Rome in the 1970's called " THE LIMITS TO GROWTH " have proven almost completely correct - this planet is now rapidly running out of the traditional resources that has enabled the very affluent Capitalist world to survive - especially fossil fuels ...Even if we do use the last of these dwindling resources , they will only serve to speed up our own annihilation in the form of runaway , catastrophic Climate Change ...

So, in an extraordinary way, Zen has from ancient times, exemplified the attitudes most needed for a happy ,

successful survival on this home we have inherited called planet

EARTH 

1. A respect and reverence for the earth and nature
2. Living simply so that others may SIMPLY live (For the population the challenge is - how to make frugality "the new sexy ")
3. Growing food in your own garden and generally acting

LOCAL

while thinking GLOBAL. There is now needed and already happening , a Revolution in low carbon Food , Energy , Transport , Waste and Water and Zen practitioners can be leaders in this revolution (" Back to The Future ") drawing on their wonderful history of simple , frugal living and reverence for nature ... as well as the basic principle underlying ALL the moral precepts " DO NO HARM " Importantly what has always been a tremendous strength of Zen has been the Practising Community or Sangha ... Now the wider population needs to adopt a new sense of Community Co-operation in the sense that ZEN communities have historically understood and lived e.g. this is now widely happening in the movement towards ' Community Food Gardens ' in the suburbs of the large cities ... (The advent of COVID 19 has helped make this the right time for a sustainability revolution - with record sales in backyard garden tools, seeds , provisions, record rooftop solar and bicycle sales - the population is already now moving !)

In conclusion , these new 'sustainable living movements' around the World are harbingers of what Zen has always understood : That Dharma and Gaia must be brought together in a practical and real way so that a Future is Possible and so that this Earth and ALL sentient being may Survive and Thrive...

For The Earth ,
Peter Joshu Thompson

BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF DHARMA GAIA

Peter Thompson

In March 2014 I initiated the formation of The Dharma Gaia Fellowship ...This was mainly inspired as I became increasingly aware of the Global Warming and Climate Change Emergency . I had first begun to become more fully aware of the dangers of Global Warming after watching the Al Gore Documentary Movie "An Inconvenient Truth " with a group of friends in 2006 ...I was impressed by the scientific and factual nature of what was being presented at the time and later evidence and personal experience only served to confirm this truth over the following years .

Before this in the 1970's and 80's I had been involved with Buddhist Communities in the Northern Rivers area of NSW and they had all been involved in trying to save our environment , particularly forests and rivers i.e. The trees and forests of Terania Creek, The Nightcap Ranges, The Errinundra Plateau Forest in Victoria and The Franklin River in Tasmania...So in my mind and heart Buddhism already held a

strong association and connection with saving our natural environment...

Also in my early Zen practice days of the 1980's Robert Aitken Roshi was often talking about his good friend, American Beat Zen Poet Gary Snyder, who was like the Henry David Thoreau of The Dharma Bum Group ...He was a great advocate for saving wild places and the natural world as it is and was an early advocate for what is now an ecodharma approach ...

So I felt that Dharma and Gaia needed to come together in a new and evolutionary way - a Hegelian style transcendent synthesis ...and that Buddhism and Zen in particular needed to come out and drive the Dharma banner into the earth and be very boldly clear on the spiritual nature and roots of the current Ecological Crisis around the Globe.

Buddhism needed to be clear that much of the degradation that was destroying this Planet was caused by the three poisons of Greed , Hatred and Ignorance and that if ignorance was dissolved here , then greed and hatred could no longer flourish in the same destructive way .The primary destructive force was of course greed fostered and justified by the post WW2 Western Capitalist Model...It was very obvious that the greed of Western inspired Capitalism had become a deeply spiritual challenge (called by Kevin Rudd " The greatest moral challenge of our time ") and the biggest survival threat to all sentient beings on this Planet.

I wanted to encapsulate how Buddhism would see this current moral and survival challenge in ONE page that would be a call to action for the Buddhist world - The Dharma Gaia Manifesto.



DHARMA GAIA Fellowship Manifesto

The trees, mountains and rivers *are* my true face.

New eras produce new challenges which require new responses and initiatives. The Dharma Gaia Fellowship is one of these initiatives.

As practitioners of the Buddha Way we understand that all life is sacred — we practise to protect, care for and save the multitudinous beings, sentient and non-sentient, dissolving the three human poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance.

The motto and the credo “Greed is Good” has now come to dominate much of human activity on the planet, producing disastrous and tragic effects on our environment and climate. The insatiable, greedy pushing for endless growth without limit has been like a cancer, out of control. It has created chaos and havoc in human populations, our beloved plants and animals and indeed the entire ecosystem we call Earth. Economics has more than ever become a moral and a survival issue.

Over 90% of world climate scientists are now convinced that the prevailing climate crisis is the result of human activity. Much of this activity is propelled by ignorance and greed. Ignorance usually precedes greed and hatred. We know that the power of mindful awareness can dissolve ignorance and therefore greed.

Innumerable historical examples show that when groups of like-minded people meet for a common purpose great changes can happen.

The first aim of the Dharma Gaia Fellowship is to meet, share and discuss these issues together — dispelling ignorance around our relationship to our environment, our Earth and the current climate crisis. To enhance and empower our discussion we shall include periods of mindfulness practice as part of our meetings.

The second aim is to encourage, share and discuss skilful means and knowledge which may facilitate our meeting the lifestyle, food, energy and building challenges which now confront us as a society. How can we most readily and practically make the survival changes which are required?

In our meetings we shall aim to share knowledge, skills and creativity about these matters.

The Dharma Gaia Fellowship brings together two of the most important threads of our lives: our cherished Dharma spiritual practice concerning the Great Matter of birth and death, and the need to return to our mother Earth — giving up ignorant, greedy and destructive pathways by learning and adopting life-sustaining, creative solutions.

May All Beings Be Happy



Thanks to Angie for supplying this quote from Thich Nhat Hahn



PEACE IS ALL AROUND US - IN THE WORLD AND IN NATURE - AND WITHIN US - IN OUR BODIES, AND OUR SPIRITS. ONCE WE LEARN TO TOUCH THIS PEACE, WE WILL BE HEALED AND TRANSFORMED. IT IS NOT A MATTER OF FAITH; IT IS A MATTER OF PRACTICE. WHEN UNDERSTANDING IS BORN IN ME, COMPASSION IS ALSO BORN.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

TAKING ACTION (NO MATTER HOW SMALL) WITH ACTIVE HOPE (THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS)

Trudi Hayes International and Australian rEConnects Facilitator.

I am grateful for the privilege to be invited to meet with you all this past Sunday and share in your OzZen session on Eco Dharma. I am grateful to connect with others in such a space, to acknowledge our feelings of grief and pain in these times that we live.

“Let this darkness be a bell tower and you the bell. As you ring, what batters you becomes your strength.” Rainer Maria Rilke

As mentioned, I started this work over 20 years ago and felt the need to connect and find a touchpoint to express my concerns, hurt, anger, fear, emptiness and rage at our rapidly changing world. A world in which ancient cultures are so fragmented, their knowledge is now being lost - completely gone; where over 150 animal and plant species are becoming extinct each day; ice bergs are melting; seas levels rising; extreme temperatures are becoming the norm and catastrophic bushfires are our new way of summer.

What can we do with this? How do we 'face the mess we're in, without going crazy?'

Through understanding this work we transform our pain into taking action, no matter how small. We connect with others in this pain and support each other in our actions. We shift in our perspective and begin to know and feel that "something is better than nothing", and the more "somethings" begins to create change.

The Active Hope work is about understanding the 3 stories we are faced with in this time:

Business as Usual - blinkers on, eyes straight ahead...

The Great Unravelling - We are all doomed and there is no hope, we are spiralling down the rabbit hole never to return...

The Great Turning - What if...What if I, we, could make a difference? What could life as we know it become? What could change bring? What if we could turn this ship around and create real and sustainable change?

Which story do you want to be yours?

Active hope is about moving into the “Great Turning” for ourselves and our future generations of humans, animals, plant species and beyond!

How can we do this?

Over time Joanna Macy developed a series of touchpoints, exercises, rituals, that move through a spiral. The spiral can be used in 5 mins, 1 hour, 1 day, a week or over a period of time. The spiral continues and repeats, but always, always, bringing something new and different.

The spiral begins with **Gratitude**...

Coming from **Gratitude**, opens up our hearts and it is from this opening that we can truly enter further into the spiral, by **Honouring Our Pain**, touching our pain. From this open space, we touch our pain in such a way that we honour what it needs and give it respect. In this pain we can connect also with others and share in our and their pain together.

Through honouring and exploring this pain there is point where a shift happens, a new perspective is gained and we begin to **See with New Eyes**. A glimmer, an opening, a space, a feeling, a new connection...a knowing.

It is then in this space, that we can begin to sit and create, something small, something tangible, something of hope.

We then begin to take action and **Go Forth** in Active Hope.

When I sat in the Zoom room, with you all and felt the pain, it is a pain I know and carry with me at times. I don't think it ever goes away, but I do know and I have seen, that through this work, it can be transformed, shifted and different and new

perspectives gained. People can be ignited to create change, feel change and continue to hope and be active.

If this speaks to you and you want to find out more, get in touch, let's continue the conversation...

“Active Hope is not wishful thinking.
Active Hope is not waiting to be rescued
by some saviour.
Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life
on whose behalf we can act.
We belong to this world.
The web of life is calling us forth at this time.
We've come a long way and are here to play our part.
With Active Hope we realize that there are adventures in store,
strengths to discover, and comrades to link arms with.
Active Hope is a readiness to discover the strengths
in ourselves and in others;
a readiness to discover the reasons for hope
and the occasions for love.
A readiness to discover the size and strength of our hearts,
our quickness of mind, our steadiness of purpose,
our own authority, our love for life,
the liveliness of our curiosity,
the unsuspected deep well of patience and diligence,
the keenness of our senses, and our capacity to lead.
None of these can be discovered in an armchair or without risk.”
— Joanna Macy

Active Hope Website

<https://www.activehope.info/index.html>

The Work that Reconnects

<https://workthatreconnects.org/>

Joanna Macy

<https://www.joannamacy.net/main>

Joanna Macy - Embracing Pain (this video, had we had time, I wanted to play for you in our time together)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fnEUhZlirw&t=8s>

Kind regards

Trudi Hayes

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Graphic supplied by Trudi Hayes.

During our Zoom Zendo session on August 30th devoted to the practice of Ecodharma, Jed provided this quote as inspiration when we may feel overwhelmed with despair at the state of our world:

“ ... So what do you do? Here is what you do. You observe and you engage, you read and you partake, you march and you Occupy and you feel it all, way down deep.

You get in there and participate the hell out of the messyglorious world because you are, after all, bound to it, part of it, one of a billion nautilus shells floating in the great slipstream. ..

But at the same time, you maybe realize one mandatory, life-saving, overarching idea: the karma of the world is not yours to take on.

This is what the wise ones say: Care about your issues, change what you can in your own world, love the hell out of everyone around you like a dog loves peanut butter, but realize the collective burdens of the planet will crush you dead in an instant if you try to shoulder them all...

Do not succumb to the boring hellpit of teeming misery. It's just too easy. Care deeply, love messily, handle your own karma like an awestruck child handles a pile of wet clay. As the mystics remind us again and again, it's the only thing that ever seems to work.” <https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/morford/article/Magical-seashells-of-fun-and-horror-2319225.php>

Please enjoy some peaceful music made by our member Kate...

NAVAJO DREAMINGAn original cd with 6 compositions
by Kate Koch
with the hauntingly beautiful sounds of the Native American
Flute + piano/ guitar & silver flute.

<https://soundcloud.com/radha-kate/sets/new-private-playlist>



Thanks to Angie for sharing these thoughts...

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

Last Sunday's session on Zen and Ecology (August 30) was both thought-provoking and inspiring. The talks by Phil, Peter and Trudi offered much food for thought, and everyone's contribution to the discussion added further perspective to this very timely theme.

As has happened previously, I was left wondering about the human expectation, in terms of the future of our planet, and life as we know it. When we consider the rapid rate at which Western 'civilisation' is destroying the environment, along with the unsustainable population growth, I often think that the most logical outcome, is for the earth to simply shake us off, and go about its business without us.

The COVID-19 situation that has been with us for the best part of this year, has demonstrated what can happen to the earth with less impact from humans and their assorted 'toys'. The result has included improved air quality, cleaner waterways, and a proliferation of insect and bird life in some areas. The question must then be asked: what's in it for the earth and its non-human inhabitants, to sustain our presence here?

I am a great proponent of hope and of collective action for the highest good. But as I feel the collective pain that results from witnessing the ignorance and arrogance of those decision-makers who persist in putting personal gain and comfort before a healthy and happy earth, I have to wonder what that pain really is. What are we grieving? Who are we feeling sorry for? There is little doubt that at the rate we are going, the earth will be a lot better off without us. Many say that the tipping-point is well past us, and that we are simply trying to make ourselves feel better by taking action of some description.

Perhaps a Zen perspective might encapsulate the detachment and the humility that recognises that Mother Nature will have the last say, regardless of how important we humans think we are, in this scenario.

Mandy has suggested that others may benefit from reading this article from the online publication 'Lion's Roar'. I have reproduced a truncated version -Ed.

I VOW NOT TO BURN OUT (Lion's Roar MAY 14, 2020)

By Mushim Patricia Ikeda

'... How many of us who have taken the bodhisattva vow are on a ... path toward burnout? Is it possible for us, as disciples of the Buddha, to engage with systemic change, grow and deepen our spiritual practice, and, if we're laypeople, also care for our families? How can we do all of this without collapsing? In my world, there always seems to be way too much to do, along with too much suffering and societal corruption and not enough spaces of deep rest and regeneration.

When I get desperate, which is pretty often, I ask myself how to not be overwhelmed by despair or cynicism. For my own sake, for my family, and for my sangha, I need to vow to not burn out. And I ask others to vow similarly so they'll be around when I need them for support. In fact, I've formulated a "Great Vow for Mindful Activists":

Aware of suffering and injustice, I, _____, am working to create a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. I promise, for the benefit of all, to practice self-care, mindfulness, healing, and joy. *I vow to not burn out.*

It's the first thing I give to students in my yearlong program of secular mindfulness for social justice activists. I ask them to sign and date it, because each of them, through their work as community leaders and agents of change, is a precious resource...

The cosmic bodhisattvas like Sadaparibhuta and Avalokitesvara and the rest of the gang don't burn out. Maybe they have big muscles from continuously rowing suffering beings to the farther shore. They are willing to take abuse while demonstrating unfailing respect and love toward sentient beings. When something bad happens, they immediately absorb the blame. They vow to return, lifetime after lifetime, until the great work is fully accomplished, and until that probably distant time they remain upbeat, serene, and self-sacrificing...

In the social justice activist circles I travel in, giving your lifejacket away and going down with the sinking ship is now understood as a well-intentioned but mistaken old-school gesture—right now, the sinking ship is our entire planet, and there are no lifeboats. As the people with disabilities in my sangha have said, in order to practice universal access there needs to be a radical shift toward an embodied practice of "All of us or none of us."

In other words, no one can be left behind on the sinking ship, not even those who want to self-martyr. Why? Because self-martyrdom is bad role modelling. Burnout and self-sacrifice, the paradigm of the lone hero who takes nothing for herself and gives everything to others, injure all of us who are trying to bring the dharma into everyday lay life through communities of transformative well-being, where the exchange of self for other is re-envisioned as the care of self in service to the community. The longer we live, the healthier we are; the happier we feel, the more we can gain the experience and wisdom needed to contribute toward a collective reimagining of relationships, education, work, and play.

... we now live in the midst of multiple ongoing crises. Thich Nhat Hanh has said that the future Buddha, Maitreya, may be a community, not an individual. Perhaps your community, like mine, is in need of inventive ways to carve out spaces for what some are now calling “radical rest.” ...

Healing. Rest. Self-care. Restorative justice. Restorative yoga. Trauma-informed dynamic mindfulness. Compassion. Love. Community healing. These are words I hear every day within spiritual activist forums, from “scholartivists” and from people embodying the bodhisattva vow to save all beings.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his fellow organizers sometimes planned protests to occur at around eleven in the morning, because then the people who were arrested would get lunch in jail and wouldn’t have to wait many hours to eat. For those of you who may feel that social-change work isn’t your thing, or that it’s too big to take on, it may help you, as it helped me, to know that it often comes down to these little details. Every movement is made of real people, and every action is broken down into separate tasks. This is work we need to do and can do together.

How can you make your life sustainable—physically, emotionally, financially, intellectually, spiritually? Are you helping create communities rooted in values of sustainability, including environmental and cultural sustainability? Do you feel that you have enough time and space to take in thoughts and images and experiences of things that are joyful and nourishing? What are your resources when you feel isolated or powerless?

Samsara is burning down all of our houses. We need a path of radical transformation, and there’s no question in my mind that the bodhisattva path is it. Speaking as a mother and a woman of colour, I think we’re all going to need to be braver than some of us have been prepared to be. But brave in a sustainable way—remaining with our children, our families, and our communities. We need to build this new “woke” way of living together—how it functions, handles conflict, makes decisions, eats and loves, grieves and plays. And we can’t do that by burning out... “

Contribution from Kate

*How can I call that which is without form beautiful?
That which gives beauty to beauty, life to life.
This radiant joy, this profound silence,
this immense emptiness is like solid ether
when experienced inside the Being.
Here, immeasurable silence, incomparable beauty,
unbroken peace, unfading love shine timelessly.*

Mooji, WHITE FIRE Second Ed (2020) Mooji Media Publications www.mooji.org



Original Photo of Boambee Creek supplied by Kate

Another talented member, Pingala, has provided the following online links to her artworks so that others may enjoy them.

During our Zoom Zendo dedicated to Ecodharma, Pingala mentioned that she has been involved in protests and projects to protect the environment for many years. Some of her contribution takes the form of artworks which draw attention to the plight of our endangered species. I was unfortunately unable to reproduce any here in this newsletter, but please access some online. I'm sure you won't be disappointed. – Ed.

“Here are some links to my work online, through *Behance*, a designer and artist online community –

v **SONGS TO A DEEPER WORLD** a collection of artworks created as a tribute to nature: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/8021629/songs-to-a-deeper-world-%28collection%29-ARTPhotographic>

v **Tarkine Huon Dreaming**, a nature mandala created for the Tarkine in Motion project produced by the Bob Brown Foundation: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/55321281/TARKINE-Huon-Dreaming-nature-mandala>

v **Tarkine Dreaming**, a short film describing my work with the Tarkine in Motion project, originally produced and broadcasted with ABC
Open: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/101598257/Tarkine-Dreaming-Pingala-Walsh-art-video>.

v **Beauty from Beneath**, an award winning photograph: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/42549315/Beauty-from-Beneath-won-an-award>

v **Black Prince nature mandala**: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/56851319/BLACK-PRINCE-nature-mandala>

v **Pingala Walsh portfolio index**: <https://www.behance.net/pingalawalsh>. An index to some of both my art and design projects.

. . . And some blurb I use to describe what I do:

Pingala shoots, etches and weaves photographs to create location and nature inspired works describing worlds of wonder and natural beauty, in tribute to the depth of nature.

Photographic images are multiple layered, worked and composed using a variety of digital photographic techniques. With more than a decade of working in this way, Pingala calls this technique *Photographic Art*. Her graphic design skills allow strong technical knowledge in creating archival fine art limited edition prints.

I currently have a small work in the *12 x 12 exhibition @ Art Space, Urunga*.

Pingala Walsh art + design E pingala@pingalawalsh.com W www.pingalawalsh.com

DANA

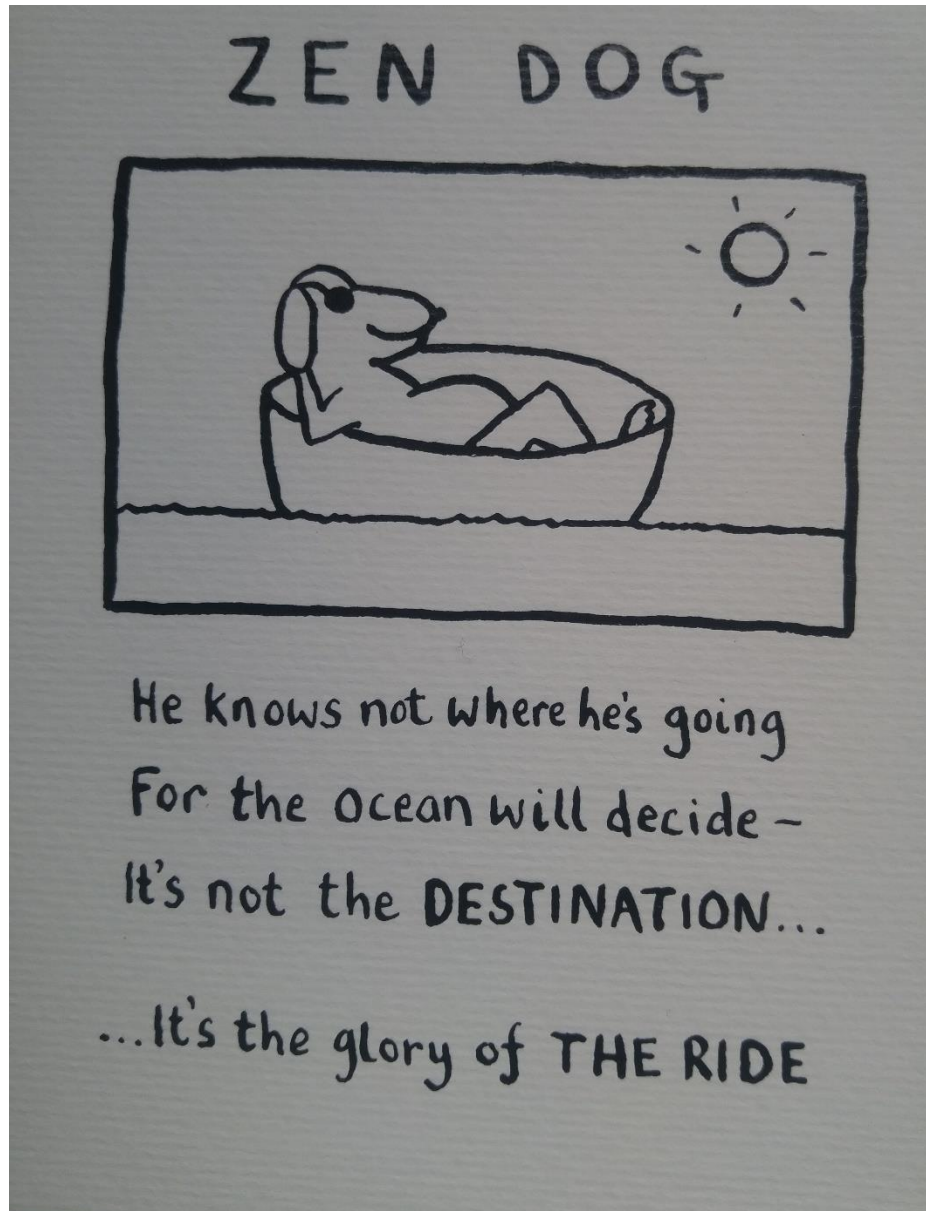
Would you like to thank Andrew for all his on-going efforts?

He spends quite a lot of time and effort preparing for our
zoom zendo sessions each Wednesday and the longer
sessions every second Sunday.

If you're able to demonstrate your gratitude by way of a
monetary donation, please go to our website ordinarymind.com.au
and click on the 'donate' option. Please give what you can.

If you have not yet done so, please consider becoming a member of OzZen. Membership is free at the moment and it enables you to have a say in the future of our community. Please complete the form on the last page and forward to the address given.

To finish...please enjoy this bit of whimsy supplied by Vreni...



OzZen

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

NEW MEMBERS:

I, Contact number
(name of applicant)

of,
.....

.....

Email:

hereby apply to become a member of OzZen. In the event of my admission as a member, I agree to be bound by the rules of the Association for the duration of my membership.

.....Date:
(signature of applicant)

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS:

☐ I CONSENT TO MY MEMBERSHIP DETAILS BEING SHARED WITH SANGHA MEMBERS

Name

Signature:.....Date:.....

Please return to rubyandjill@gmail.com