

Chapter 7

KEEPING PEACE WITH NATURE

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“Peace” is a term often riddled with romantic idealization, projection, and doublepeak. Political agendas and moral values of peacekeeping are not necessarily aligned in situations of conflict. Contemporary Buddhist leaders describe peace as something you do as spiritual practice. For Thich Nhat Hanh, each calm, mindful breath or step can be a step generating peace and awareness. For His Holiness the Dalai Lama, peace comes from the practice of kindness and compassion. Buddhists who take up the bodhisattva way are encouraged to practice equanimity or patience to sustain peacekeeping in everyday life. One way to define peace, then, is the cultivation, through practice, of a state of mind which can envision and manifest peaceful relations with others. Internal and external peace are seen as mutually regenerating and co-creative. Here in particular, I will look at cultivating peaceful relations with the natural world.

Peace can also be seen as the absence or at least minimization of suffering. Though Buddhists recognize that suffering is inevitable in human life, one can make an effort to reduce or eliminate some forms of suffering. Buddhist philosophy and practice emphasize the principle of nonharming or *ahimsa*. “Nonviolence,” as this is sometimes translated, means more than the absence of violent acts or thoughts. It means acting positively toward constructing peace. The opening stanzas of the *Dharmapada* state, “For hate is not conquered by hate; hate is conquered by love. This is a law eter-

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nal."¹ Thai teacher Buddhadasa suggests that peace means being true friends to all beings and to one's self. Thus peacekeeping, from a Buddhist perspective, includes ending not only violence in human society, so widespread across the planet, but also violence towards plants and animals, rivers and oceans.

Clearly there are ample opportunities for peacemaking in the end-of-the-century escalation of the war against nature, what some have called "World War Three." A first step in keeping peace with nature calls for contact with ecological suffering in the world today. One must meet directly the ravaged land of industrial clearcuts, the chemical soup of polluted waters, the sprawling megacities filled with traffic and smog. In these places of life-threatening deterioration, peacemaking as a practice has real consequences for both human and nonhuman beings.

Reducing suffering can be a moral, political, spiritual, and practical peacemaking goal. One can begin by recognizing the suffering caused by the Three Poisons—greed, hate, and ignorance—in all their many forms. Acknowledging cruelty in treatment of trees and animals, for example, can awaken compassion and generate motivation for policy changes and public education. Resisting consumerist lures can help manage the suffering of greed through simplifying personal possessions. Combating the ignorance of stereotyping can open up avenues for understanding, not only between social groups but in relations with plants and animals. In most peacemaking dialogues, the primary parties are human beings. If we want to reduce environmental suffering, those dialogues will need to recognize the nonhumans who have been harmed and propose appropriate peacemaking measures to redress this harm.

One way to begin this work is to look for examples in some of the common realms of peacemaking action. I will organize my ideas around a model that includes four phases of emotional and spiritual work: 1) repentance, 2) resistance, 3) root cause analysis, and 4) rebuilding moral culture. This framework presents opportunities which can be taken up in pieces or as a whole, in whatever order is appropriate for the situation at hand. Most examples will reflect my familiarity with socially-engaged Buddhism, particularly in the area of environmental work. Perhaps they can inspire similar

actions elsewhere or provide springboards for creativity in moving toward a peaceful and healthy environment, as well as society.

Repentance acts provide opportunities to recognize wrongdoing in the past and present, with the hope of preventing similar misdeeds in the future. With regard to the natural world, this may mean expressing grief, remorse, or regret that people have done such extensive and unthinking damage to other living beings. Repentance also acknowledges human fallibility and the limits of human wisdom and understanding. Accepting these elements of the human endeavor, one might choose to be more cautious regarding the ecological impacts of human projects.

As part of her Deep Ecology work, scholar-activist Joanna Macy has developed a number of workshop activities that allow participants to express their difficult feelings regarding human impact on other beings.² In the "Truth Mandala," people come forth to speak in witness to their concerns for the earth. A central circle is divided into four quadrants representing fear, sorrow, anger, and deprivation. The ritual or ceremony is a series of testimonies, made powerful by the cumulative weight of feelings in the group. In "The Council of All Beings," created with Australian rainforest activist John Seed, people allow themselves to be called by another life form to speak on its behalf at the Council. Using masks to indicate the other voice, the plant and animal representatives share their current ecological troubles with each other. They then invite several humans into the center of the circle to call humans to account for their actions. In the last round, the life forms offer their unique powers to the humans to help them see how to heal the damage they have caused to the planet.

Rochester Zen Center and affiliates hold regular repentance ceremonies as part of the yearly ritual cycle. In 1992, the Vermont Zen Center hosted the annual Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) meeting over the Columbus Day holiday in October. That year marked the 500th anniversary of the "discovery" of America, an event seen as misnamed and culturally destructive from the perspective of indigenous peoples. BPF members participated in a Zen repentance ceremony adapted for the occasion to address the tensions of colonizer and colonized. Sitting in *zazen*, they passed the

incense bowl around and spoke their regrets and remorse quietly, honoring "all our ancient twisted karma/ from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion." The simple but formal ceremony allowed people to be present with the power of this complex karma and its far-reaching effects.

Resistance, or holding actions, call attention to suffering, often with a forceful message of "STOP," "no more," "this is not okay." They aim to stop or reduce destructive activity, buying time for more effective long-term strategies. Protests of various scales help to define the dimensions of what is morally acceptable to the concerned public. Such actions open up dialogue and bring issues to the community for reflection. As people stand together to express concern, they act in solidarity, finding a common base for correcting injustice and improving ecological relations.

In Thailand, Buddhist monks have gained international recognition for galvanizing local people to address environmental violence in their villages. Two of the most effective methods have been tree ordination ceremonies and peace witness walks.³ The tree ceremonies grew out of the frustration of village monks with the national plundering of local forests. Villagers were suffering loss of food, firewood, and homes. In response, forest monks took traditional orange monks' robes and wrapped them around senior trees in the forest in a formal ordination ceremony. This designated the largest local trees as "priests" and protectors of the forest, sending a strong moral message to those who would cut them down. Others known as "development monks" have led environmental pilgrimages around polluted lakes, inviting local people to walk with them in solidarity as witnesses to unsafe water and unplanned urban growth. A group of peacemaking monks who call themselves "Dhammayarita" are continuing to organize more such walks across Thailand as important rounds of moral resistance to excessive suffering.

In the United States, Buddhist activists have joined resistance efforts for forest protection and nuclear arms reduction. A small group who call themselves "ecosattvas" were impelled to protest the logging of old growth redwood groves in northern California. Drawing on local support from the Humboldt County eco-sangha and national support from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, they led

people in creating a large prayer flag covered with human handprints of mud. This served as visual testimony of solidarity for all who participated in Headwaters forest actions. The next year, several *ecosattvas* made a pilgrimage into the heart of the Headwaters, carrying a Tibetan treasure vase. Activists had taken the vase to San Francisco Area sangha meetings and invited people to offer gifts and prayers on behalf of the redwoods. The vase was ceremonially buried beneath one of the giants to strengthen spiritual protection for the trees.⁴

American Buddhists have also joined in resistance efforts against nuclear weapons and below-ground nuclear waste storage. At the Nevada Test Site near Las Vegas, Buddhists from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship offered an adaptation of a Buddha's birthday ceremony as support for those planning to commit civil disobedience and step across federal lines. Under Joanna Macy's leadership, a study group met for several years, taking the position that nuclear waste was safer above ground where it could be monitored. Using imagination combined with careful investigation, they developed an alternate vision of nuclear guardianship based in Buddhist spiritual practices.⁵ Around the same time, Japan had arranged for several shipments of plutonium to be reprocessed in France and then shipped back to Japan. Zen student and artist Mayumi Oda helped to organize resistance to stop these shipments of deadly nuclear material. One ship was temporarily stopped, and although shipments resumed, the actions raised awareness in Japan and the United States, affecting Japanese government policies.

Root cause analysis applies peacekeeping methods to the structural origins of suffering. In-depth examination is necessary to address the entrenched patterns of systemic violence. Much suffering results from business policies or cultural customs that rationalize environmental destruction. A subgroup of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship who call themselves the "Think Sangha" is engaged in just such structural analysis of global consumerism. Collaborating between the United States and Southeast Asia, they have held on-line and on-site conferences targeting "Alternatives to Consumerism." Through global trade analysis and review of economic policies, they show

how Western-style consumerism is taking its toll on local culture.⁶ Thai activist Sulak Sivaraksa points out the moral problems of neo-colonialist expansionism in "Think Big" development approaches.⁷ Santikaro Bhikkhu shows how greed, hate, and ignorance take on structural form in leading social institutions. For example, rationalized hate or aggression is central to the military; rapacious greed for natural resources is standard in many economic structures.⁸

American scholars have also prepared structural analyses using Buddhist principles to shed light on environmental violence and press for better human-nature relations. Rita Gross, Buddhist feminist scholar, has laid out a Buddhist framework considering the impact of pronatalist values and policies on global population issues.⁹ Process theologian and mediator Jay McDaniel has developed spiritual arguments for compassionate treatment of animals as a fundamental human responsibility.¹⁰ Buddhist scholar Kenneth Kraft discusses the eco-karma and eco-koans of nuclear waste and the challenges activists face in undertaking socially engaged practice.¹¹ Sociologist Bill Devall has integrated Buddhist principles with Arne Naess's Deep Ecology philosophy, urging simplification of needs and wants.¹²

Reclaiming moral culture is the social transformational work critical to accomplishing systemic change from the ground up. This work lies in the arenas of family, home, school, and community, where moral values have traditionally been cultivated. With escalating fragmentation of landscapes and attention spans, moral reflection has taken a backseat to consumerism. Long-term peacekeeping depends on reversing such decline by cultivating moral responsiveness to other beings and to the life of Earth itself.

The practice of *ahimsa* or nonharming lies at the foundation of peacekeeping practice aimed at reducing environmental suffering. All the Buddhist precepts are based fundamentally on nonharming of self and others. Practicing the first precept, "not killing," raises moral dilemmas around food, land use, pesticides, pollution, and cultural economic invasion. The second precept, "not stealing," raises questions about global trade and corporate exploitation of resources. "Not lying" brings up issues in advertising and consumerism that promote exploitive cultural values. "Not engaging in abusive rela-

tions" points to a broad realm of cruelty and disrespect for nonhuman others. "Not using drugs and alcohol" can be interpreted broadly to include the toxic applications of insecticides and herbicides.¹³ Practicing restraint and nonharming directly reduce suffering in the context of rapidly deteriorating global ecosystems, loading the odds for more peaceful relations with nature.

For many students, environmental awareness and personal lifestyle change flow naturally from a Buddhist practice commitment. Many people are turning to vegetarianism and veganism as compassionate food choices for animals and ecosystems. Others are committed to eating only organically grown food in order to support pesticide-free soil and healthy farming. Thich Nhat Hanh has strongly encouraged students to examine consumption habits, not only around food and alcohol, but also television, music, books, and magazines.¹⁴ Buddhist values of restraint and simplicity are celebrated in "International Buy Nothing Day," a moral protest event targeted for the busiest shopping day right after Thanksgiving.

Practicing moral relations in community is perhaps the most demanding challenge of the Three Refugees. In a speedy, product-driven society, most students are drawn to the calming effects of meditation practice and the personal depth of student-teacher relationships. From a green Buddhist perspective, sangha work means not only the challenges of personal and institutional relations, but also creating sustainable ecological relations. Because of the scope of environmental deterioration, reparations work can only be effective done in collaboration or community. Working together for mutual support can not only prevent activist burnout but offer the opportunity to develop *kalyana mita*, or spiritual friendship.

Retreat centers act as focal points for transmitting Buddhist values to committed Buddhist practitioners and the visiting public. To the extent that practice places reinforce ecological caretaking with spiritual principles, they provide a cultural model for moral commitment to the environment. For example, Green Gulch Zen Center in northern California demonstrates institutional responsibility for the environment through its food practices, waste recycling, and water use. By cooking vegetarian, it withdraws support from the inhumane institutional practices associated with factory

animal farming and animal slaughter. It also avoids contributing to the accelerated clearing of global rainforests for cattle pasture and beef imports. Food served at Green Gulch includes as much in-season produce as possible from the organic farm. Food waste goes into large compost piles adjacent to the farm and garden. Water for human use and farming is drawn from local sources and managed according to the year's rainfall. Printed materials such as the introductory booklet on Green Gulch environmental practices help educate visitors about these institutional commitments.

Zen poet and ecophilosopher Gary Snyder brings his sangha work home through the framework of bioregional thinking and organizing. His basis for this is more than moral and ecological; it is aesthetic, economic, and practice-based. From his perspective, the bioregional community "does not end at the human boundaries; we are in a community with certain trees, plants, birds, animals."¹⁵ He encourages others to take up the practice of "rehabitation," learning to live on the land with the same respect and understanding as the original indigenous people. Snyder has been a leader in establishing the Yuba River Institute, a bioregional watershed organization working in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management. They have done ground survey work, controlled burns, and creek restoration projects engaging the local community in the process. "To restore the land one must live and work in a place. To work in a place is to work with others. People who work together in a place become a community, and a community, in time, grows a culture."¹⁶ Snyder models the level of commitment necessary to inhabit a place and build community culture that might eventually span generations.

These four arenas of peacemaking—repentance, resistance, root cause analysis, and rebuilding moral culture—offer strong potential for rebuilding damaged relations with the natural world. The list of environmental war zones has been well documented; the liabilities of loss are well known to people of many regions. A peacemaking commitment for a healthy world now must include restoration of moral relations with nonhuman beings. Working together, Buddhists and non-Buddhists can find ways to help each other in underraking this important and life-sustaining work. May this work

help reduce the suffering of plant and animal beings caught in the web of human activity and may it bring awakening to those who follow the peacemaking path.

NOTES

1. *The Dhammapadam*, trans. Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin Books, 1973).
2. Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (Gabriola, British Columbia: New Society Books, 1998).
3. These and other environmental activist examples are described in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000 forthcoming).
4. Wendy Johnson, "A Prayer for the Forest," *Tricycle* 8:1 (Fall 1998), 84-85.
5. Joanna Macy, "Guarding the Earth," *Inquiring Mind* 7(2):1.4-5.12, Spring 1991.
6. See 1998-1999 issues of *Seeds of Peace* for reports and announcements of these events.
7. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990).
8. Santikaro Bhikkhu, "The Four Noble Truths of Dhammic Socialism" in *Entering the Realm of Reality: Towards Dhammic Societies*, ed. Jonathan Watts, Alan Senauke, and Santikaro Bhikkhu (Bankok: Suktisiam, 1997), 89-161.
9. Rina Gross, "Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment" in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 291-312.
10. Jay B. McDaniel, *Earth, Sky, Gods, and Mortals: Developing an Ecological Spirituality* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-third Publications, 1990).
11. Kenneth Kraft, "Nuclear Ecology and Engaged Buddhism" in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 269-290.
12. Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1988).
13. Green Gulch Zen Center Ecological Precepts, *Buddhist Peace Fellowship Journal*, Summer 1990, 33.
14. Thich Nhat Hanh, *For a Future to Be Possible* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993).
15. David Barnhill, "Great Earth Sangha: Gary Snyder's View of Nature as Community," in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 192.
16. Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1995), 250.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING ON BUDDHISM AND ECOLOGY

- Barchelor, Martine and Brown, Kerry, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology* (London: Cassell Publishers, 1992). One of five introductory volumes on the five major world religions and the environment, this set of essays addresses Buddhist teachings and practice and how they apply to ecological issues.
- Chapple, Christopher Key, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Origins of the practice of nonviolence in early India with applications to contemporary issues such as vegetarianism, animal protection, death by choice.
- Gottlieb, Roger, ed., *This Sacred Earth* (New York: Routledge, 1996). The most complete anthology on a wide range of religious traditions and their teachings for the environment.
- Kapleau, Philip, *To Cherish All Life: A Buddhist Case for Becoming Vegetarian* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982). A compelling argument for vegetarianism based on Buddhist thought and practice.
- Kaza, Stephanie, *The Attentive Heart: Conversations with Trees* (New York: Ballantine, 1993). Meditative nature writing essays from a Zen deep ecological perspective, with a particular interest in meeting individual trees as sentient beings.
- Kaza, Stephanie and Kraft, Kenneth, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources for a Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, out in January, 2000). Anthology of classical and modern texts, including advice and reflection from Buddhist environmental activists.
- Macy, Joanna, and Brown, Molly Young, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 1998). Practical experiential exercises to introduce deep ecology and Buddhist principles into environmental perception and organizing.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich, "The Sun My Heart" in *Love in Action* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993). Mindfulness teachings as they relate to interdependence from an ecological and spiritual view. Guidelines for practicing with the Jewel Net of Indra and the ten penetrations.
- Seed, John, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming, and Arne Naess, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1988). Practices for weaving together deep ecology with Buddhist reverence for life, including guidelines for leading a Council of All Beings workshop/ceremony.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak, *Seeds of Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992). Essays on economic development in Thailand and its relationship to Buddhist principles and Western consumerism.
- Snyder, Gary, *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990). Penetrating essays from Buddhist revolutionary bioregionalist poet-philosopher Snyder on the natural world and Zen Buddhist teachings and practice.
- Tucker, Mary Evelyn, and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

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