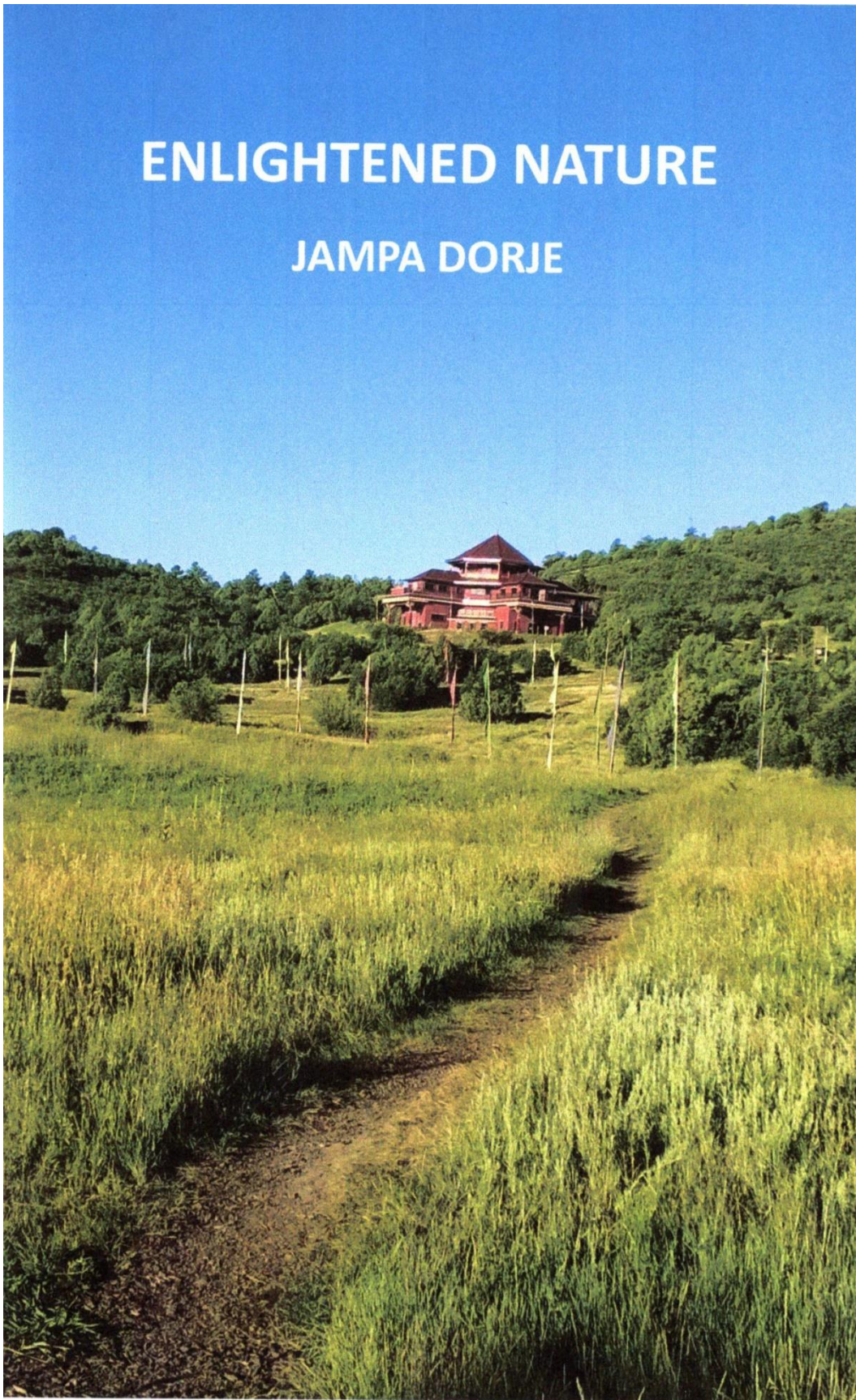


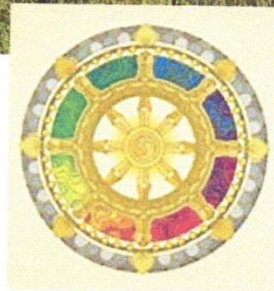
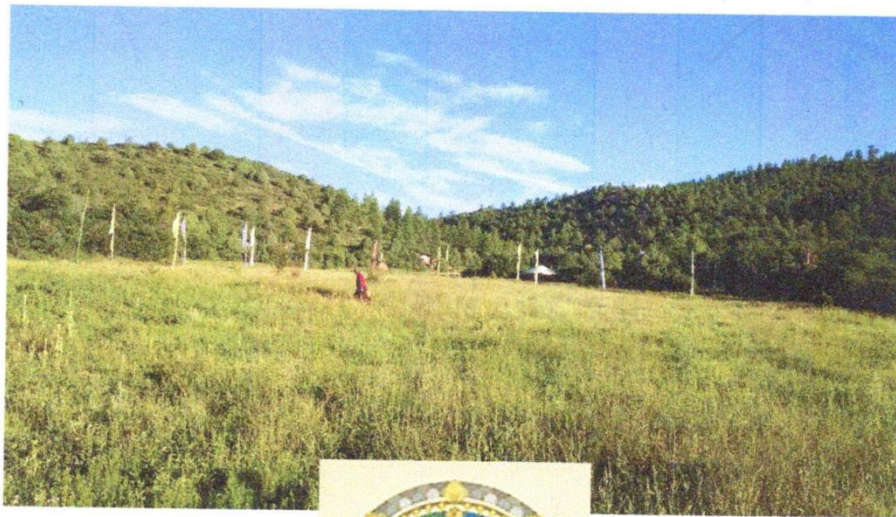
# ENLIGHTENED NATURE

JAMPA DORJE



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IN MEMORY OF  
WYNN ALAN BRUCE  
(1971-2022)

Thanks to youTube:

Thich Nhat Hanh - The Heart of Buddha's Teaching  
Interview with Hanh on Environment and Inter-being  
Oprah and Hanh

Photos by the author:

front, Tara Mandala Temple; back, garden in Ellensburg



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The following discussions, entitled “Thoughts on an Enlightened Nature” are the result of my responding to posts by students in Dr. Clayton Bohnet’s online CWU philosophy class, “What Is Enlightenment?” (Spring 2022).

ABSTRACT: We were asked, “What are some central concepts that Thich Naht Hanh uses to discuss the way we relate or do not relate to nature? How would you say that we have related to nature and how would you discuss how Hanh suggests we should be relating to nature?”

The term ECOLOGY has its linguistic roots in Greek: Ecology (from Ancient Greek οἶκος (*oîkos*) 'house', and -λογία (-λογία) 'study of') is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment. Gary Snyder, one of my first Zen teachers (who was influenced by Thich Nhat Hanh), coined the term “Earth House Hold” in his 1957 book of that title.

What is our relationship with the natural world? This is what Hanh asks. Enlightenment is to become aware of, to awaken to, the fact that there is no birth and no death, only a continuum of consciousness through the eight realms of *samsara* (cyclic existence). In these realms, we are born in a state of ignorance. In this state, if we don’t realize our Buddha Nature, we wander in *samsara* with a vague sense of being out-of-tune with our environment. We are unaware of our inter-dependent involvement with our place in society, in the natural world, and in the cosmos. We are born in ignorance; we have consciousness; we learn to differentiate things, give them names, recognize their forms, and differentiate between our senses. We have contact with objects and develop memory of these experiences. When we have contact with pleasurable things, we have desire for them; with negative things, we develop aversion for them; with some things we develop a neutral attitude. In contact with pleasurable things, we crave them; with craving comes clinging; and so, the wheel completes itself with our attachment to things that are transient that, in turn, bring suffering when lost or destroyed. This is the wheel of dependent origination: how life arises, exists, and continues. That is the formula, and without finding the link that can break the chain, we repeat and repeat the same cycle. Hanh believes the weak link is to be found by beginning with the Self in meditation. Being a cloud, being a tree. Sitting like a mountain with the mind open like the sky. For example: Walking Meditation—mindful of each step, being in a pure land, breathing in the negative and breathing out the healing of Buddha mind.



We've touched on the Four Noble Truths (with the Eight-fold Path) and the Five Precepts. To this, we could add the concept of The Middle Way. The "middle way" means a balanced way of living, of avoiding extremes, of finding harmony withing the interdependence of the living web of existence. The Middle Way is a way of living both physically and mentally. It is not a passive approach; it is an active approach. Mindfulness, for example, requires a continue effort.

The Middle Way is a path between materialism and spiritualism. To maintain balance on this path, a practitioner develops the Six Perfections: Generosity, Patience, Discipline, Diligence, Concentration, and Wisdom. It is towards these transcendental perfections that one practices the Eight-fold Path. As my grandmother used to say, "The reward of patience is patience."

Reply from T'Naya Ramirez

Hey Jampa!

Thank you for sharing the middle way with me. I admit my thoughts are guilty of being extreme. I think that is partly because of anxiety/trauma and my mind's ability to see most things from a circular "cradle to grave" perspective.

The middle way is not a concept I have come across before. What a beautiful way. A method of balance, of dualism, dualistically living in the physical sphere and mental sphere. I feel like I am in or "stuck" in the middle way. I am "boujee" about some material things, but I try to choose "the most good for all", sustainability, compassion, and empathy when it comes to everything else. I plan to take your wisdom and become a "practitioner" and practice Generosity (giving), Patience, Discipline, Diligence, Concentration, and Wisdom.

Sophia, hiho

You claim the destruction of the environment is caused by a small elite. According to Gallup, 55% of Americans have a stock portfolio, and they are interested in their bottom line. As Philip Whalen, a Zen Master and Beat Poet, once said, "No none likes war, but they do like the money it brings in." In the Theravada tradition (of which Hanh is a follower), Renunciation is a Transcendental Perfection. We could all use a good dose of it. This is why the Buddhist path begins with addressing the problems of the SELF or ego-centered identity. Once this monkey-mind (money-mind) is trained to distinguished between the voices of "I want" and "I need" effective progress for saving the planet from destruction can proceed.

Ah, Stephanie

You speak a sacred truth. Yes, "Buddhists believe nature is important and valuable." The Ancients

had a saying: "As Above, So Below." Somehow, this Cosmic Consciousness was flipped on its head during the Age of Enlightenment, not intentionally but as a byproduct of dispelling superstition. The pre-Galilean universe had Earth/Man in the center between Sun/Heaven and the Lower Realms. We existed between the Angels and the Devils, and on the Flat Earth there was an edge to Space beyond which there were dragons, and though the Clock ticked its ticks, for a long while things did not progress in any perceptual way from the time of the Roman Empire. In 1336, Petrarch, a poet who many consider the father of humanism and the first modern man, climbed a small mountain in Italy (Mont Ventoux, 6000 ft.), and had an epiphany: "I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again. ... [W]e look about us for what is to be found only within" (Petrarch – Wikipedia). This story illustrates Hanh's concept of interrelatedness and relates just how hard and slow a path we tread towards enlightenment.

Yo, Nelson, right on

An old Hippie saying: YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT. Scary thought, as I am writing this while chewing on a crunchy Butterfinger Bar. I just stopped and looked at the label, and it says "No artificial flavors or colors; gluten free; added colors from other sources; globally sourced ingredients." If I'm really worried, there is a number I can phone for more information. Wow. Now, after ingesting these global ingredients, I have to deal with the package. The Social Justice Movement plays into this with regulatory rules passed through Congress for safety standards and, to some extent, for the recycling of the waste products, and I am happy for all the product control, but I wonder, "Did I need this snack?"

Hi, Mackenzie

You sum up an understanding of the concept of interdependence. Without a cosmic perspective, it is hard to know if there are any ultimate intrinsic values. This is where the concept of Emptiness comes into play. All things are transient, impermanent, illusory. This is so for ideas as well as things. It is difficult for the Western mind to get a handle on this aspect of Buddhist metaphysics. It comes back to the meaning of suffering. It is not so much a matter of good or bad, as it is a practical matter of how to deal with a pressing problem. The planet will spin on with or without us no matter what condition it is in. We as a species may become extinct. That would be really deep Deep Ecology. The Solar System has interdependent activities, as do Galaxies: tiny asteroids pelt us all the time; a comet struck and wiped out much of life 66 million years ago; I got dusted by Mt. Saint Helens in 1980; some years later, I planted trees in the ash; and so, it goes.

Briar, well done.

It is difficult to explain the paradoxical nature of life, the universe, and everything. Our dualistic mindset creates polarities in our explanations of moral issues, esthetic issues, social and environmental issues, and no matter what subject we dwell on, we speak of things as happening sooner or later, as part and whole, as black or white. This way of thinking traps us into creating band-aid solutions to ongoing problems. Desire/Ignorance/Anger spin us through time, like a tornado, leaving a path of destruction. Laws can help, and prayers can help; but what can really help is finding compassion. For Buddha, the brain is not the location of the mind; the brain is just another organ, one that processes ideas and impressions. The MIND IS LOCATED IN THE HEART. Enlightened Mind is called *Bodhicitta*. Bodhicitta is a concept within Buddhism that refers to the “enlightened mind,” a state of mind in which an individual desires—above all other things—to be empathetic toward all beings, as well as dedicated to helping others find enlightenment and freedom from suffering.

Meira, hail

Mindfulness is to be fully present and aware (both) of where we are and what we are doing at the time we are doing what we are doing. Being is being aware of oneself as the ground of consciousness and not be overwhelmed by emotions and ideas and the tumult around us. Mindfulness is to be awake to the inner workings of our mental, emotional, and physical processes. This is what is meant by being aware of reality. In this sense, reality is the teacher, the Buddha mind. This awareness that comes from an investigation of the nature of reality can be gained through meditation. Meditation (the Path) comes in many forms, but basically it involves two techniques: concentration (a physically and mentally relaxed, one-pointed state of mind within which there is clear, lucid awareness (known to Tibetan practitioners as “Clear Light”) and insight a determined effort to investigate the relationship between the inner self and the outer world. The result (or Fruit) is to accept reality as-it-is-in-itself without desire or rejection in a state of Equanimity.

MIND FULL OF NATURE

Fire leaps about the hearth

Clouds swirl across the sky

Water stalks the sand

Land rises and falls



Beast, plant, galaxy, atom  
Space binds mind

Hail, Sekeun

You say, "...that humans are interdependent because they cannot live without the help of nature." It may sound ecological chauvinistic, but I wonder, given that from a Buddhist point of view, if reality is an illusion this interdependence works both ways. A radical idealism would have it that, if we weren't conscious of nature, it wouldn't exist. And this is why the "Bells of Mindfulness" are ringing.

Hi, Ethan

"Symbiosis" is a lovely word, coming from Ancient Greek *-syn*, which means together or with, and *-viosis*, which means life. It literally means living together. There is a similar sense of harmony or balance in the Greek word *συμφωνία (symphonia)*, meaning "agreement or concord of sound" (Wiki). The 17th c. astronomer Johannes Kepler said he could hear the "music of the spheres." Presently, but not so pleasantly, we humans are creating an atonal symphony on this planet.

Hi, Luke

The word "spiritual" is used in several ways. Often, it refers to a religious-type person. In the 19th century, the word "spirit" referred to a part of a person that is the source of the emotions and character (whatever that is, maybe a type of personality?). In Biblical terms, spirit means soul. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) thought the "soul" was located in the pituitary gland, but anatomists have not found any evidence of it. Since Freud (1856-1939) got on the bandwagon, we've been focused on SELF. So, in contemporary terms, when you say, "We use it with love and can be free when connecting with nature," you can be considered a spiritual person.

Hi, Adriana

You say, "Hahn (sic) states that we do not own nature and we should learn to reside alongside it, and to respect and maintain the integrity of nature. and to respect and maintain the integrity of nature." True, but Hanh goes deeper. We are caught up in nature rather than alongside it. Being and non-being, life and death are how we experience each moment, like the coming and going of a cloud (YouTube: Signlessness: A Cloud Never Dies).

Hi, Niecia

You say, "Nature seems to be a give some take some, while we as humans tend to take more than we give." In the *Old Testament*, we were cast out of the Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 3:23) Still, Nature was seen as our home: *Isaiah* 55:12 - "For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap [their] hands." *Psalms* 69:34 - "Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein."

The idea that the whole of Creation is the work of God and is good is carried over into the *New Testament*, but during the Middle Ages, there was an increasing sense that the World is controlled by the Devil. Saint Augustine claimed we are born amid piss and shit. This suggests that it is our duty to leave this world for a better world in Heaven. Life is seen as a veil of tears and the End Times are always upon us. Use up the world's goods for there will be no tomorrow seems to be the theme of the theologians.

But the possibility of literally destroying Earth is a modern concept. Ancient Egyptians connected with nature by utilizing the annual flooding of the Nile Valley between two hostile deserts. The Pre-Socratic philosophers had concepts that reflect modern science's pre-occupation with a reductive approach to discover the smallest particles of nature (quantum mechanics). Early science was trying to get to the bottom of things and to apply their knowledge to enhance our lives. In proportion to population, there were plenty of resources for our use. Today, it is another story. Descartes' *Discourse on Method* was published in 1619 and Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity* was published in 1916. A lot has changed in the last three centuries.

Repeating what you say, "Nature seems to be a give some take some, while we as humans tend to take more than we give." I agree. Whether or not there is any teleological purpose to life on earth, if we want merely to survive, we had better start giving back soon. It's late, and the cancelation date is clearly printed on the can. The question is whether or not we can reverse course.

T'Naya Ramirez

Jampa,

Your posts are so "rooted." You have so much knowledge and find a beautiful way to convey your growing tree of knowledge to us "youngin's." I appreciate your inclusion of the Greek translation of ecology, "house," and "study," as if to say that ecology is the study of one's house. Not the house right over our heads but the house that is all around us, in the space between the spaces.

The ominous house of Earth, nature, animals, minerals, space, and time. Your share reminded me of a picture with the caption, “Grandmother, how do I heal?” By touching nature. The image is of an elderly woman with glistening grey hair, sitting naked in a field with all of her “personal” autonomy covered by the beautiful vegetation surrounding her. She is playing with, well, in the dirt. She is covered in tattoos of bugs/animals, plants, skulls, a rosary, and the words summertime sadness. Perhaps the trick to returning to nature to touching nature is as simple as playing in the dirt, like a child who digs holes, collects dirt, and makes literal “mud pies.”

I respond:

Yes, T’Naya, “play” is essential to sanity, so mudpies are also an important ingredient in a healthy environment. Having a yard to make mudpies is a must. The idea of “household” brings along with it the idea of having a budget for household expenses, keeping on the lights, maintenance, and so forth. But a house must also be a home, and this requires respect and love.

Hi, Brandon

Well thought out summary of Hanh’s Buddhist take on our relationship to Nature. We have been focusing on East/West views, but, closer to home, the Native American’s have a similar view of our interconnectedness to our environment.

A Wiki elf tells me (Wiki-Braiding Sweetgrass)—

*“Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* is a 2013 nonfiction book by Potawatomi professor Robin Wall Kimmerer, about the role of Indigenous knowledge as an alternative or complementary approach to Western mainstream scientific methodologies. Braiding Sweetgrass explores reciprocal relationships between humans and the land, with a focus on the role of plants and botany in both Native American and Western traditions. The book received largely positive reviews, appearing on several bestseller lists. Robin Wall Kimmerer is known for her scholarship on traditional ecological knowledge, ethnobotany, and moss ecology.”

To Brandon Oh

You write: “Human nature is not ‘nature’. Human nature is not content with the state in which nature should be in essence. Now where I lie confused I think is where you consider humans as co-existing, and relying, they are interconnected with nature, yet humans and their excess consumption, their unnecessary suffering, their desires is not considered to be true nature.”

I think some of your confusion may lie in the different uses of the word “nature”—(1) the

phenomena of the physical world (without humans), the “natural world”; (2) physical forces causing and regulating these phenomena: “laws of nature”; (3) essence: inherent/basic/essential characteristics.

Buddha understands the “natural world” as a place where sentient beings suffer: Gods suffer, humans and other animals suffer, ghosts suffer, and hell beings suffer (some teachings include plants, as well). This is called “Samsara.” It is not as though this place doesn’t exist, but it’s essence (essential nature) is emptiness. The essence of phenomena is emptiness, but it’s nature (the natural world) manifests. This is the first teaching of Buddha. The second teaching is on sign-lessness. The naming of things creates a dualism of Self and Other. More suffering. These two teachings, along with the third teaching on ego-lessness are known as The Doors of Liberation. Nirvana is the state of non-suffering. However, remember that second teaching: both Samsara and Nirvana are concepts of the mind.

Well done, Kate

Thích Nhất Hạnh follows the Middle Way path of Gautama Buddha. Closer to home we have a Transcendental Philosopher and author Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) who wrote *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, first published in 1854, an American classic, that is a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings. Thoreau may have been looking for a middle way between being a hermit living in the woods and, at the same time, being someone who appreciated the arts and sciences and found them useful. As he donned an ascetic’s mantle and moved to Walden Pond, he was looking for solitude and the freedom to think his thoughts without the cacophonous energy of the industrial landscape that he found himself immersed in. Throughout his book, Thoreau admonishes his countrymen to realize how disconnected we are from Nature and how technology has added to our numbness and distress. Thoreau chose the woods as a place to deliberate on the meaning of life, a place where he can, as he puts it, “live deliberately.”

Hi, Afton

You get it,—but let me fine tune the way in which Buddha claimed to teach suffering. He was born into the Hindu Religion. It is a huge philosophical system with six major branches. Buddha breaks with tradition. He does not want to rehash all the metaphysical and epistemological debates. He goes right to the root problem: suffering. Suffering is many layered. There is the suffering from injury and deformity and old age. These are natural. It’s the suffering of the suffering that is unnecessary that he focuses on. Why do we feel out-of-tune with our lives? He compares it to a wheel being off-center and to an arm being dis-located. He sees that we are out

of harmony with “nature” because we are looking at things as though they can be made permanent, whereas the “nature” of things is transient, impermanent, illusory, like a dream. We attach and cling, and objects, then, break and people grow old and pass on, and we suffer. It is not that we can’t have friends and loved ones or bright, shining things, but to expect them to last forever is a wrong view. Once this ignorance is transformed into wisdom, life is revealed in the truth of its perfection.

Hi, Chris

You are right about the Perennial Teaching of the world’s religions. The message that we must live in harmony with nature or be excluded is taught by sages, east, west, north, and south. Thoreau went to the woods deliberately, which is to say he made a conscious choice,—but another meaning of the word in the phrase to live deliberately is to say that he wanted to be in touch with his life in a more authentic way. Once he was alone in Nature, he could see another strata of consciousness, a certain doubleness, which was his mere self beneath the layer of his social self. When he is leaving Walden Pond, he reflects (in “Conclusion”) on what he calls his “experiment” of living in the woods:

“The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!”

And, then, with a pre-Jungian flourish, he notes:

“...if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

Yes, Tyler

I think you are right. If the principle of co-existence is taken to heart, people will want to continue to work with other to take care of Earth. The Buddhas of past eons had the luxury of a smaller number of samsaric sufferers and a distant future in which they could teach the Path to the Door of Enlightenment. From scientific observation we are nearing the Door of Destruction. Luckily, Enlightened Mind is close to the surface of consciousness. You can sense this in Hanh's presence when he teaches, but there is much resistance from our ego-centric mind frame. That is natural when the polis is polarized, as it is at present. We are presented with extreme policy positions without any center ground in sight, as dualistic minds duel in the darkness of fear and hatred. The Buddha of this Eon (The Kali Yuga) teaches The Middle Way. The Age of Enlightenment sought to find The Middle Way, too. Liberal Democracy (that’s a democracy that is compassionate and

inclusive of all living beings) has not yet shown its face. The only other choices are anarchy or an oligarchical kleptocracy (which, to some extent, we have now). Vote in the primaries, while it still counts. It's a mystical experience and one of the few places where you can exert free will.

#### WHY ARE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES?

Activist Cora Tucker says it best: "People don't get all the connections. They say the environment is over here, the civil rights group is over there, the women's group is over there, and the other groups are here. Actually all of them are one group, and the issues we fight become null and void if we have no clean water to drink, no clean air to breathe and nothing to eat" ([theavarnagroup.com/2016/Sandler-and-Pezzulo.pdf](http://theavarnagroup.com/2016/Sandler-and-Pezzulo.pdf)).

Which came first? It's a matter of how these movements are defined. There have been philosophers and social reformers attempting to bring about social and political justice from ancient times. (Plato's *Republic*). In modern times, the formal designation of social and political "movements" has a specific character. As defined in the *New World Encyclopedia*: "Political movements that evolved in late eighteenth century, like those connected to the French Revolution and Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791, are among the first documented social movements, although Tilly notes that the British abolitionist movement has 'some claim' to be the first social movement (becoming one between the sugar boycott of 1791, and the second great petition drive of 1806)" ([newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Social\\_movement](http://newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Social_movement)).

There were many social reform movements in the 19th c. America: women's suffrage, abolishment of slavery, and temperance. Social reformation groups were prominent in England. Godwin and Wollstonecraft were prominent figures during The Age of Enlightenment. In the 20th c., the different movements mostly focused on: Women's Rights, Civil Rights, Gay Rights, Internal Resistance Against Apartheid, Anti-war, nuclear disarmament, and the Environment. These movements have continued into the 21st c. with additional movements being formed: voting rights, health care, climate change, refugee crisis, racial inequality, police brutality, income disparity, gun violence, women's rights, LGBTQ ([yu.edu/wurzweiler/blog/2020-biggest-social-justice-issues](http://yu.edu/wurzweiler/blog/2020-biggest-social-justice-issues)).

In a strict sense of terms, the Environmental Justice Movement, as it now called, begins in the 1980s and was influenced by the Civil Rights Movement. It focused on the impact of industrial society on marginalized groups (Wiki). The Social Justice Movement, as it now called, also began in the 1980s (Wiki). These movements cross over with members in both camps, as well as in opposing political parties.

EJM-like consciousness arose in the 19th c. An early example would be the Coal Abasement Society (1898). John Muir (1838-1914), called the "Father of the National Parks," was one of founders of the Sierra Club, that is a conservation organization (Wiki). Transcendental

philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau wrote on the value of nature. A crossover of a socially conscious and environmentally conscious project might New York City's Central Park (1858), developed by Frederick Law Olmstead, a landscape architect. The Environmental Protection Agency was formed during the Nixon Administration, in 1970. In 2021, The Sierra Club's board of directors voted to officially admonish two members who have publicly defended the legacy of the group's famed founder, John Muir, who had racist views, pointing out that the wilderness is not the preserve of white backpackers and mountain climbers ([huffpost.com/entry/sierra-club-muir](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sierra-club-muir)).

The effect upon nature by the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, was apparent from the get go. William Blake railed that Reason was a false god. Frederick Schelling was woke to the importance of the environment, calling it a World-Soul, and his ideas influenced the Romantic Poets who celebrated the beauties of nature. Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1854) gave insight into our place in nature and suggested a closer kinship with other animals than was then taught in religious circles. I suppose God's placing Adam in the Garden "to dress and keep it" (*Gen. 2:15*) might be construed as an early environmental precept and Jesus' teachings as a type of social reform.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency website: ([epa.gov/environmentaljustice](https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice)): "Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: (1) Environmental Justice, (2) The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and (3) Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."

What is Social Justice? Social justice is the equal access to wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.

"Justice for our planet and justice for all people are two profound conversations that are happening simultaneously, but often in different rooms. The interconnectedness of daily human life and the state of the Earth often goes unexamined, but at this point in human history we cannot afford to separate these conversations." ([pachamama.org/how-social-justice-and-environmental-justice-are-intrinsically-interconnected?](https://pachamama.org/how-social-justice-and-environmental-justice-are-intrinsically-interconnected/))

According to a Wiki elf, "Environmental justice is a social movement to address the unfair exposure of poor and marginalized communities to harms associated with resource extraction, hazardous waste, and other land uses." This data is gleaned from David Schlosberg in his book, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

What Is the difference between environmental and social justice? According to environmental

justice lawyer Ben Crump: "Social justice aims to ensure fair treatment of individuals and groups. The concept of social justice is that every group or individual receives a fair share of social and economic benefits, as well as environmental benefits. As such, environmental justice is an integral part of social justice. In social justice, advantages, as well as disadvantages, should be distributed evenly across all members of society, regardless of their race or background. The difference between environmental and social justice is that environmental justice, although part of social justice, deals exclusively with the environment. Environmental justice is primarily concerned with the positive as well as negative effects that different environmental factors can have on communities and individuals." (<https://bencrump.com/environmental-justice-lawyer/what-is-the-difference-between-environmental-and-social-justice/>)

## REPLIES TO SJM AND EJM POSTS

Katherine Camarata

Social justice can be described as a means to provide equal opportunity and representation to people of all backgrounds, belonging to any group. Social justice focuses on fair distribution of "social, environmental and economic benefits." Environmental justice specifically focuses on preserving resources for future generations as a means of redistributing power to those who are not in direct control of the majority of finances and policy. Efforts in this movement that gained traction in the '70s and '80s include outreach to educate people about environment conservation and pollution, land restoration and conservation, and regulations on industrial facilities and their impact on surrounding areas.

(<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/greenspace-in-practice/practical-considerations-and-challenges-to-greenspace/social-and-environmental-justice>)

I found this fabulous article claiming that social injustices and ecological destruction are both results of the same flawed systems that must be broken down and reconstructed. "Dominant current culture is the result of a long history of the narrative that natural and human resources exist for exploitation, commodification and control, and to fuel economic growth." The authors claim that capitalism has resulted in the current apex we are experiencing during the Anthropocene and describe how it intersects with social/racial inequality. The Anthropocene is a result of colonialist/imperialist tendencies, so just as other social justice movements like BLM or MMNIW aim to dismantle current oppressive systems, so do ecological efforts aim to dismantle these systems (<https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com>).

In a similar vein to Buddhist philosophy, when we release attachment to the ego, we are able to look beyond profit and feel empathy for the ways we are harming other creatures and ourselves. If the pain of the plants and the polar bears with no homes is taken on to become our own pain,



if we see ourselves in others sharing the same soul, maybe we can behave in a way that is less harmful. Easier said than done when corporations are selling us plastic left and right and only want to go green to keep up appearances (i.e. greenwashing).

Brilliant, Kama, excellent critique

Where the Anthropocene meets the Plastocene: Wrathful Alyeska, auger in one hand, marsh probe in one hand, geo-stick in one hand, polaski in another. I take soil samples along the surveyed route from Valdez to Tonsina. I follow the Lowe River through alder swamps across marsh muck to bog mire. Streams jammed with rotting salmon. I note the conglomeration from glacier deposits. Along glacier benches to bedrock, across rivers to bedrock, to bedrock under ridges, under boulders, under cobbles, under sill, under sand, under volcanic ash. I take a rest and get sick. At Trans-Alaska Pipeline Point on Ground TAPS PG=361+68, I join my copter pilot. From the Alouette, Dhal sheep graze below me. A bull moose into the brush as we land. Up the line, a grizzly and her cubs hiding. From the Arctic Ocean at Prudhoe Bay, over the Brooks Range, across Koyukuk River, across the Yukon River and the Tanana, stretching across the Alaskan Range, this in temperatures below zero for more than one hundred days, below forty below for weeks, dropping to eighty below in arctic winds, the pipeline slouches towards Valdez.

Alaska, who lives there?

Caribou, wolves and bear.

This grizzly airs a grudge  
that everyone fears to judge.

A refinery doesn't smell  
like Chanel, more like hell.

Mackenzie, well done

You summed it up nicely. If you read my post, you can see I was all over the map, but it was a good road trip searching for the sources of the SJM and the EJM. It may be, in a distant future, if we survive a nuclear Armageddon and still have a planet, we have a very altered biological and zoological environment consisting of a monocultural "book of nature" with us in our Matrix submarines directing the technology of the day and still looking for the really real reality in a Dune-like landscape debating this same issue.

Afton,

A riff on Wittenstein: Whatever effects people's well-being can be considered a social issue. Fact. If traced to the workings of nature, these effects can be considered an environmental issue. Fact. Climate change, as presently substantiated by scientific research and unbiased observation is effecting changes in the social order. This is the case. Environmental changes in and of themselves are not positive or negative. Those changes that can be traced to effects society has on the environment are environmental issues that need addressing for our survival. These can be considered negative. If this is the case, people need to find a solution. Everything else remains the same. That's the world.

Nelson, good work.

It's clear that what happens in nature effects all creatures large and small; all life is affected, even the rocks. Studying geology, lately, with Nick Zenter on YouTube, Nick on the Rocks; there's nothing like a good lahar (catastrophic volcanic mudflow, to change a landscape; tough being a caveman if you are in its path with hot rocks coming at you at 65 mph; hard when the glaciers melt and the caribou leave, too. Today, we have greenhouse gases and microplastics and industrial wastes mucking everything up. Society has always been on the brink. Not the first time a civilization has collapsed. I wish us Enlightenment!

Hi, Sekeun, good research

I'm all for helping everyone find happiness. But at what cost to the environment? These last few centuries have seen the population of the world grow rapidly. It took over 2 million years for the population to reach one billion, in 1800, and 200 years to reach nearly eight billion, today. Resources. Energy. Resources. Energy. Resources. Energy. MORE. MORE. MORE. How can we live more frugally is the Enlightenment question for today's consumers?

Stephanie, nice work

You mention that "many believe that it is an ethical failure to not take care of the planet," and I would agree, if I understood whether or not the Universe really cares. I think that it is an esthetic problem. We have to develop feelings for the planet, if it is going to allow us to survive. It's a matter of reciprocity.

Briar, good insight about consciousness

Brings us back to Enlightenment. It's difficult to see the interconnectedness of our livelihood and the land we live on. From the time we took this land from the indigenous peoples, property rights

is what this country is mainly concerned with. Ownership = Egoship.

“A core aspect of the modern state concerns the concept of property. Whether property encompasses objects, land, or even ideas, we have laws to define the process by which we can justly gain ownership of certain things and to give us security once we hold this property, and a judicial system to punish those who don’t abide by the rules” (The Modern State Concerns The Concept Of Property | Bartleby).

And we back up this ownership with constitutional rights of protection so we can do with it as we wish. Not a good foundation for stewardship. Make a buck and to heck with whoever lives downstream has been the attitude of robber barons from time immemorial.

Well done, Meira

You and your classmates, including myself, have all, so far, concluded that environment issues are social issues. As a philosophical question, the answer seems self-evident. However, I am not sure of what use this conclusion is. I doubt that this realization enlightens me much. Might clear up confusion about the role the environment is involved with motivating people to join a movement to change the way the government or the corporations or the neighbors are acting. Might inspire me to recycle my plastic containers or pick up trash on the trail I am hiking along. Social movements usually focus on one thing at a time. It's hard to change habits. Discipline and focus and effort are what bring about change. Usually, we remain complacent until the volcano erupts, and then it's too late, and we are covered in pyroclastic debris.

Hi, Adriana, your comment on fairness reminded me of John Rawls concept of justice as fairness. “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical” is an essay by John Rawls, published in 1985. In it he describes his conception of justice. It comprises two main principles of liberty and equality; the second is subdivided into Fair Equality of Opportunity and the Difference Principle ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice\\_as\\_Fairness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice_as_Fairness)).

It is hard to dole out justice and be fair, as the story of King Solomon reveals. A firm grasp of the concept of justice is necessary when every situation is different. We will touch on a concept of situational ethics when we begin to study Buddhist approaches to the dilemma.

Jared, good work

I think our consciousness is the consciousness of the planet, the world-soul, but we have a death wish. Why is this? We live in darkness and believe we have “bodies without organs” (I’m riffing

on a concept by Deleuze.) This is our EGO. To quote Henry Miller (*Sexus*), “We must die as egos and be/ born again in the swarm, not/ separate and self-hypnotized, but/ individual and related.” Maybe we have a chance, still. I don’t know.

Niecia, well done

Climate change, as we are experiencing it today, is most likely (from what I hear, here in my hut at the edge of the world) caused by the “emission of greenhouse gases, mostly carbon dioxide and methane. Burning fossil fuels for energy and livestock use creates most of these emissions. Agriculture, steelmaking, cement production, and forest loss are additional sources” (Wiki). But am I to trust Wikipedia? Am I to trust the scientific data? Am I to trust my intuition?

A riff from Gary Snyder: Earth is our household, and since Paleolithic times, climate change and threat of extinction have plagued us. If we are to grow and survive as an animal species we will need to learn to live in self-disciplined freedom. Enlightenment is just the ticket.

Hi, Sophia

In the long run, the way things seem to be going, the rich as well as the poor will find living on an uninhabitable planet hard to deal with. There is a story circulating among zoologists (I couldn't find the source), that around 1,000,000 CE Earth will look like Mars does now, with canals meandering where once there were rivers, and the dominant species will be a giant Spider (the highest insect on the food chain) who will catch huge seeds in their webs and feed them to the last surviving critter of the animal kingdom, a monoculture of hybrid rat-rabbits, who they raise for nourishment. Hi ho, there is a future, but I don't like the look of it. We have been studying how critical analysis of our minds and the world has led us out of the Dark Ages. Here we are at an evolutionary juncture. Somehow, we must fuse the sciences with the humanities or we are doomed. This would be East-West Enlightenment.

Hi, Ethan

The butterfly effect: a little bit of pollution goes a long ways. Here’s a haiku by Gary Snyder:

a butterfly  
scarred up from its flower  
caught by the wind and swept over the cliff

Hi, Allyssa

The dream of the Millennium harkens back to a time when there was ecological balance, a time of singing and dancing, of classless society and freedom. It is still a future open to us. Blessings ;)

Excellent work, Brandon, well-reasoned and provocative in your self-questioning approach to this question. You say: "But the BIGGEST step in actually making a dent in our impending doom is through legislative and governmental action." Yes, and the first step, after becoming informed on the issues, is to VOTE in the midterms. And not for a third party.

Fine work, Kate

Here's a quote from one of my teachers:

"Contemporary Science: the knowledge that society and any cultural outlook is arbitrary; and that the more we conquer Nature, the weaker we get. The objective eye of science, striving to see Nature plain, must finally look at "subject" and "object" and the very EYE that looks. We discover that all of us carry within us caves; with animals and gods on the walls; a place of ritual and magic" (Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, New Directions, p. 131). Let us leave our caves and dance in the golden sunshine.

Hi, Surafel, good job

Here's a jingle I wrote when I worked on the Alaska Pipeline:

#### CARBON FOOTPRINT

One drop goes a long way to ease the friction  
100 billion barrels of oil, that's 10 to the 10th power—  
while the answer is long nights in fur  
and the best investment is Big Foot

Briar Knudsen responds:

Hello Richard! It will always deeply confuse me how certain humans will always find a way to be selfish whether it be with land, wealth or anything else of that nature. It makes me wonder how the world would be if all of us as humans could let go of this extreme level of greed that has been poisoning people since the dawn of time. It's so disheartening that empathy seems to be so easily ignored when there is a prophet to be made.

Briar, you are so right, it is disheartening.

As a Buddhist, I know this period of time is the darkest part of the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age. However, the “prophet” you so charmingly pun on in your last sentence, regardless of whether it is Buddha, Jesus, or Bob Dylan (who is my age, 80, and will be rock ‘n’ rolling in Spokane this coming May and June) all remind us that we can “see through the brains” of the Masters of War. This insight (Enlightenment) will be our saving grace.

Katherine Camarata

Go sit under a tree and leave it an offering, like a coin or a flower or a stone, you may be surprised how your mind may open up to the idea that we are all sacred.

Ah, Katherine

Beautiful vision of you beneath the bodhicitta tree, rooted in Earth, open to the Sky, alternating between carefree days of youthful optimism and old age wisdom, free in your self-intrinsic nature.

#### PORTRAIT OF TWO OF ENVIRONMENTAL/SOCIAL ACTIVISTS

Greta Tintin Elenorha Ernman Thunberg (b. 2003 in Sweden)—At age 15, she stood outside the Swedish Parliament with a sign that read “School Strike for Climate Change” (*Skolstrejk för klimatet*); after she addressed the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference, she organized with others a group called “Friday For Future”; she sailed a yacht (no carbon footprint) to the U.S. to attend the 2019 U.N. Climate Action Summit; upon arrival, she used blunt speech: “How dare you?!” creating a media sensation with The Guardian coining the term “The Greta Affect” and The New York Times proclaiming her one of the “100 Most Influential People”; she joined others to lend support on other Social Justice issues, e.g. gun control; wrote an award-winning essay on climate change in 2018; has become a social media star with 12 million followers; her goal is to bring awareness to Social Justice and Environment Justice issues and can be summed up in the quote from an issue of Wired magazine, in 2019: “I want to feel safe. How can I feel safe when I know we are in the greatest crisis in human history?” (Wikipedia).

Social Movements have been around since the 18th c. Age of Enlightenment (Godwin, Wollstonecraft & Co.); Greta is a newcomer to this tradition. Although awareness of the looming climate apocalypse is more recent, philosophers and poets have been prophesying that the Industrial Revolution would bring disastrous results (Thoreau, Blake & Co.), and Greta falls in line with the protest movements of the 1960s that were influenced by the need for regulations from

the time of the establishment of National Parks in 1916 and later, in 1970, to the Environmental Protection Act. It is an ongoing battle against unfavorable obstacles.

. . .

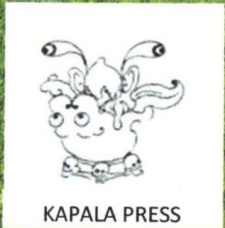
Wynn Bruce, a Buddhist environmental activist, self-immolated himself in front of the United States Supreme Court on Earth Day (April 22, 2022). This act has produced many conflicting reactions. Initially the media brushed it aside as the act of an insane person. Those who know something about the Buddhist act of self-immolation knew that the time and place were significant and that this was a act directed against the failure of governmental bodies from addressing the threat of climate change. In 1963, during the Vietnam War, Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk, set himself afire in a busy intersection in Saigon. During the 2000 Olympic in China, Tibetan monks self-immolated in protest to the oppressive regime of Chinese authorities.

In Buddhist terms, the act of self-immolation is not suicide, and oddly enough, it is not exactly an act of protest, either. Fire holds a special place in Buddhism, as it does in many Indian traditions. In the Pali canon, the Buddha often speaks of the “three poisons” (attachment, aversion, ignorance) as fires that consume us. And the realm of *samsara* (the world of birth and rebirth) is described as a world of flames. According to Chris Goto-Jones, a Buddhist Eco-Chaplain:

“In the *Maranasatti Sutta*, Buddha admonishes us to practice with the urgency of one whose turban or head is on fire. In Mahayana Buddhism, the famous ‘parable of the burning house’ in Chapter 3 of the *Lotus Sutra* depicts us as children living in a burning house, unaware of the flames and ignorant even of what flames are; if we don’t wake up to the fire, it will consume us...In 1965, Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote a letter to Martin Luther King Jr. in which he expressed concern that Buddhist self-immolation must be ‘difficult for Western Christian conscience to understand.’ (The letter appears in Hạnh’s 1967 book, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*.)

“In Nhat Hạnh’s letter to King, he explains that a self-immolating monk, ‘says with all his strength and determination that he can endure the greatest of sufferings to protect his people.’ That is, they vow to live in the burning house until everyone else has escaped. So, they take on suffering themselves in order to come alongside those who don’t even recognize the flames; they burn with compassion for the suffering of all life.” (<https://www.longmontleader.com/local-news/beyond-local-understanding-self-immolation-in-buddhism-after-wynn-bruces-earth-day-action>).

In this sense, the burning monk is saying, “Have Courage!” It is an act of love. Both Bruce and Thunberg can be considered as compassionate bodhisattvas.



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