



A THOUSAND LAHARAS  
OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Bouvard Pécuchet  
&  
Jampa Dorje

A THOUSAND LAHARS  
OF ENLIGHTENMENT  
Bouvard Pécuchet  
*and*  
Jampa Dorje



Thich Nhat Hanh  
1926-2022

Kapala Press 2022 Ellensburg

*For Kama*

*Dakini extraordinaire*

The following discussions, are the result of my responding to posts by students  
in Dr. Clayton Bohnet's Spring 2022 online CWU philosophy class, "What Is Enlightenment?"

Thanks to my classmates for the inspiration.

Cover photo: U.S Geological Survey

Title page photo: Thich Nhat Hahn, [pinterest.com](#)

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Part I: A Thousand Lahars of Enlightenment	1
Descartes and Enlightenment	6
Kant and Enlightenment	20
Part II: Enlightened Nature	33
Thoughts on Enlightened Nature	36
Are Environmental Issues Social Justice Issues?	50
Replies to SJM and EJM Posts	55
Portrait of Two Environmental-Social Activists	65
Part III: Discrimination	67
Considerations on the Plight of Women	68
Racism	85
Sexism	86
All Can Acquire the Dharma	88
Racism in the Buddhist Tradition	89
Afterword	93

## PART 1: A THOUSAND LAHARS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

A book has neither object or subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements. In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, creates an *assemblage*.

—Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*)

From a *Dzogchen* (Great Perfection) perspective, there is no “Enlightenment.” But, hell, that doesn’t help. In the East, it is to be a Buddha, one awakened to the nature of Mind. In the West, a philosophical approach utilizing reason to understand the individual self and the material universe.

Bertrand Russell (Wiki): “‘Free thought’ means thinking freely ... to be worthy of the name freethinker [ze] must be free of two things: the force of tradition and the tyranny of [hir] own passions” [I changed the pronouns].

Enlightenment Definitions from Bing: (1) the action of enlightening or the state of being enlightened: “I looked to my lama for enlightenment.” Synonyms: understanding, insight, education, learning, knowledge, awareness. (2) The Enlightenment is a European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition. It was heavily influenced by 17<sup>th</sup> c. philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Newton, and its prominent (and more radical) exponents include Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith. Definition from Wikipedia: The Enlightenment is also known as the Age of Reason, and its purpose was to challenge ideas based on faith and without scientific merit. Add on from Video *AP Euro Bit by Bit #25* (5:54) The Enlightenment ideas are embedded in the American Constitution.

Goethe said, “There is strong shadow where there is much light.” I had a good education (based on the enlightened ideas set out by John Dewey for public schools), studied chemistry and physics at U.C. Berkeley (a Land Grant College, named after an Enlightenment philosopher), joined The Order of DeMolay (a Masonic fellowship with roots in The Enlightenment), became a poet inspired by Allen Ginsberg (an enlightened being, if there ever was one), joined the Free Speech Movement, shutting down Cal Berkeley, pressing for civil rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.

So, here I am sixty years further along the wormhole of time, thinking I was well past the power pronouncements of kings and priests and the superstitious dribble of village idiots, when up pop these QAnon freaks telling me there are Neptunian space rays lighting forest fires and a whole bevy of fanatics who believe a New York conman is the Chosen One who will deliver us from the pedophiles of the Deep State. As Carl Jung says in *Psychology and Alchemy*, “People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

What a mess, these Declarations and Amendments and Laws and questions concern the place of God in the mashup, written by Anglo-Saxon, male, Protestant, property owning Pirates, the lot of them, ripping off a huge swath a land and, then cobbling together a jumble mumble of a political and religious wish list and sending it to a crazy king across an ocean. But, damn, Time was ripe for Rebellion, so they did it, much to the chagrin of most of the colonists. LIFE LIBERTY AND HAPPINESS: what a wild concept to think that these transcendentals are INALIENABLE rights, that, here and now in the immediate, we might have this ontological possibility presented to us (in a document written on parchment) by simply realizing it to be so. Englishmen and women had fled persecution because of their religious beliefs, from a country that claimed more religious freedom and legal rights than most of its neighbors, yet Calvinists couldn’t get along with Quakers who couldn’t get along with Catholics who couldn’t get along with Jews. The secular had to be separated from the religious because of this internal strife. DEISM is the belief in the existence of a supreme being, specifically of a creator who does not intervene in the universe (other than through Natural Laws) and is distinct from the white bearded dude of Theism. This is the “God” on the dollar bill *In Whom We Trust*.

Following Descartes’ methodology, “doubting” gets us to more questions that, in turn, play a part in this philosophical experiment. But I worry that The Enlightenment has become a two-edged sword, one edge that creates a better life for us using scientific technology and one creating a path to planetary destruction. It seems the blind continue to lead the blind, only now we have more sophisticated blinkers on our bridles. Are we in a new Dark Age?

These changes and revolutions related to art, thinking, politics, and religion are ongoing. Can you feel the shockwaves, as the ship of state is running into an iceberg of superstition (QAnon) and Ignorance (Trumpism)? Interesting times. Avast! Andy Warhol's Portrait of Marylin Monroe (the Mona Lisa of the 20th century) is going to auction for \$200 million. A portrait celebrating individualism! What fun!

Yes, everything has a way of circling back to politics, religious politics, school politics, family politics, the politics of inner mental states, my Ego locked down by my Super Ego when it’s not arm wrestling with my Id. Enlightenment? Yikes, how to get a grip on my tongue-tied Imagination trying to form symbolic content out of the flotsam of reality?

"What Is Enlightenment?" It's been a while since I last read Kant's essay, and I saw some things that helped me connect E and W enlightenment, like his idea of emerging from being guided by others or traditional beliefs and having courage to go beyond your mental restraints and that the attainment of enlightenment is inevitable. No one is going to do the work for you, you must put yourself to the test. Good going. I'm well on my way to the final synthesis. It seems like a delicate line to cross. Can we know when we no longer need a teacher, wondering if we will always circle back to having moments when we need guidance, even after we achieve moments of no longer needing it? There is a Sufi saying, "When the student is ready, the teacher arrives." If Enlightenment is inevitable. it seems like it will find us and teach us what it needs to, knowing a Buddha recognizes a Buddha.

Freedom from shackles? They are within and without. In Buddhism it's Samsara we're in, trying to free ourselves from ignorance, desire, and attachment. In the West, following the thoughts of Deleuze, we've got advertisement machines, law machines, church machines, bank machines, body machines, spirit machines, etc. Take me to the next whiskey bar! Only I don't drink. Oh, well, breathe, my lama tells me. Oxygen is good for calming the mind and sustaining the organs. As an octogenarian, I'm starting to get the hang of it.

How many Buddhas does it take to screw in a light bulb? Watt is the answer? Oh, well, stupid koan. Thought I'd try to enlighten you. Given that this is the Kali Yuga Age, more darkness is yet to come. Hard to know which ENLIGHTENMENT will work more effectively to save our souls and save our asses—when considered a state of being and when considered a methodological approach of knowledge—a means and an end. Science, too, can be considered a religion. Much of the culture war is about the battle between scientific fact and religious faith. This will become more apparent as we proceed with our class. The times, as Dylan sang, are a'changin'. We are definitely in for a ride.

I offer a concrete poem, one that alludes to time, space and immediate reality. Not necessarily enlightened, but hopefully humorous.

ALL

OVER

ALL

A state of grace is spiritual light, weightlessness of the soul, and also, scientifically, a light from the sun, photons, the speed of light, limits—so much darkness and what do we ask for? LIGHT. I suddenly think of William Blake (1757-1827), the English artist and poet, who was a visionary genius of the first rank, who railed against the Enlightenment: "Mock on mock on Voltaire, Rousseau/You throw your chaff against the wind/And the wind throws it back again." He created

his own mythology, and the great negative force in society was named Urizen ("your reason") representing conventional law and custom that ensnares us in its web. He called Reason "Newton's sleep" and "mind-forged manacles." He was a champion of the Poetic Imagination.

## DESCARTES AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In his introduction to *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, Issac Kramnick says that the French philosopher Jean Le Ron d'Alembert (1717-1783) called the eighteenth century *l'age des lumieres*, ("the age of splendid illumination, of light and enlightenment"), and by this designation the thinkers of his day would recognize that a new understanding of the role of the human being in the universe had emerged from the metaphysical confusion of medieval philosophy. Superstition would no longer be an epistemological bugaboo.

A major player in this "enlightenment" was the 17<sup>th</sup> c. philosopher, Rene Descartes (1596-1650). His meditative analysis of the functions of his mind, detailed in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), where he doubts every aspect of his knowledge, can be said to be the first step, since the time of the Ancient Greeks, to lay a secure foundation for the study of knowledge and, along with his mathematical contributions, to develop the empirical method.

In Part 1 of the *Discourse*, Descartes attempts to reach a consciousness of consciousness by systematically looking inwardly and holding back his assent from opinions which are not completely certain. He wants good "bricks" on which to build a foundation, so he analyses his sense experience, his imaginative capacities, and his memory to see if any of these experiences are reliable. He concludes that his experiences could be some trickery. In Part 4, Descartes arrives at a first principle of ontological tangibility. He is sure that the phenomenon of *thinking* (and from this his experience) produces a substratum of a thinking Self (an "I") who thinks. Even if objects that are discerned are in doubt, he cannot doubt there is an observer. Thus, he discovers the one thing that he cannot doubt is his own existence. His famous statement, *Cogito Ergo Sum* (I think, therefore I am) is the starting point of his philosophy.

•      •      •

Brandon Oh posts: "Some big concepts that stood out and correlated to me were intellectual constraint in regards to Enlightenment Liberalism & Locke's Letters on Toleration. Although Descartes did not describe an education system of that of no *summum bonum*, the way he describes what is offered intellectually makes it apparent that the knowledge offered is very limited, recycled and sectarian. In his discussion of systematic doubt, I found it really ironic that his description of the presupposed rule of the existence of God and all of his perfection in which "all good things in us come from him" seems very alike to what he also pointed out about the

education system in which it seemed a large majority of the books and curriculum was that of “distinguished men of past ages” that are just constantly revered and recycled. Really brings to light the question of okay well when and where was this administered? For me that’s where it gets interesting because well with the teachings of God, at least the Christian God I think the easy predisposed teaching is “Well he is the omniscient one, we do not know and are not supposed to know everything, and that is why faith is the essence of what we are believing.” So you always just end up at a wall. But when questioning flaws in education and its narrowness teachings you can most definitely get a straightforward answer. Because honestly already reading some of these perceptive thoughts have made me quite realize that even in my experience with school in my lifetime, if you were to subtract a couple of classes, a couple of contemporary units & textbooks then yeah holy \*\*\*\* man it’s really just a giant mush of math, sciences and what feels like ancient teaching and fables, like quite literally fables.

To which I reply:

Holy \*\*\*\*\*, indeed. That’s enlightenment! Science and math take the Mystery out of our feeble deliberations, while poetry and art try and put it back in. It’s challenging to maintain contradictory ideas in the mind at the same time, but now that the Bathwater of Truth has been thrown out the Window of Knowledge, we are stuck with the Babbling Baby of Insight. You have joined the Cult of Descartes and entered the Cartesian Theatre of Doubt, where the Deistic God has fled, and we worship the God of Reason under the guise of the Spirit of Material Wealth.

Hi, Sophie

I think “detachment” in this instance means we have to step back and “bracket” our thoughts away from what it is we are looking at (inwardly or outwardly) to “see” (perceive) a thing or an idea as-it-is (or at least in a state that is free of judgement). This can be a mediation exercise or a logical exercise. Good question on how to get your mind around something:

STUDY: LOOK AT

direct one's gaze toward someone or something or in a specified direction: glance · gaze · stare · gape · peer · fix one's gaze

STUDY: THINK OF

think of or regard in a specified way

regard · consider · think of · deem · judge · count · see · view · take · reckon · believe to be or have the appearance or give the impression of being

STUDY: A SUBJECT

devote time and attention to acquiring knowledge on a subject, especially by means of books

learn · read · read up on · work at · be taught · be tutored in

#### STUDY: LOOK AT CLOSELY

look at closely in order to observe or read

scrutinize · examine · inspect · consider · regard · look at · eye · observe · watch · survey

(archaic) make an effort to achieve (a result) or take into account (a person or their wishes)

Hi, Stephine

You clearly understand the task Descartes presented us with when you say that he “wanted to encourage others to clear their mind of everything they had been taught and look for the truth of things or thoughts that could be proven certain.” Been at this, now, for 80 years, and it’s not so easily accomplished. My early years are a bit fuzzy on how analytical I approached life, but once I had acquired a Gilbert Chemistry Set, at the age of 10, I was well on my way to a child-like form of logical positivism. After I read Bertrand Russell’s *History of Philosophy* and discovered David Hume, in high school, there was no turning me back. Nothing like a good dose of semiotics and language analysis to weld the jar shut. Nothing like a Peyote trip to trip up an aspiring scientist. Nothing like Elizabethan love poetry to create a catastrophic mental distraction. Nothing like the death of people you love and the destruction of things you cherish to aid in the realization that life is precious and that objects and beliefs are transient. And there’s nothing like having the nature of mind pointed out by a Dzogchen master to ground one. Doubting stuff helps, too, on the path to enlightenment.

Hi, Chris

I think you have demonstrated that Kramnick understands the role Descartes played in the Age of Enlightenment (in the 18th c.), but we have moved through the Romantic Age (19th c.) and the Modern Age (20th c.) and come out into something cryptically called the Postmodern Age (since say 1945, or so). I’m not going into the arbitrariness of these historical delineations of western culture, but (to be Hegelian, for a second) there is a dialectic, or back and forth, in the “current” of time—perhaps, an AC/DC time warp in the thermodynamical/mechanical universe—that makes us, once again, question the meaning of TRUTH or what is likely to be true. Vote Blue.

Yes, Ethan

The Age of Enlightenment, set in motion “a new way of thinking.” The population of Europe in 1800 was roughly 150 million people. There were, according to Robert Wild, in his online ThoughtCo article, eighteen key figures in the intellectual revolution. One might want to add Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, and Mary Wollstonecraft, for good measure, but my point is there were initially a small number of people who had these enlightenment ideas, and the ideas took root in every corner of society and led to good things, say improvements in medicine, and bad things such as our ability to weaponize or monetize most any invention. The current population of the U.S. is over 300 million, and we are split down the middle claiming individual rights for this and intellectual rights for that and no one seems the wiser about the meaning of truth, beauty, or goodness, which were the contemplative concepts of the Ancient Greeks. Some days, I feel I would be better off living in a hut, like I did when I was studying with the Tibetans in Colorado, but my lama told me, after four years in solitary retreat, that if I stayed any longer, I would become a “cave bug” (meaning of little use to society), so I’m back in the net of a postmodern enlightenment, still a dim bulb, but doing my best.

Hello, Luke

I think we look at the Enlightenment Age as though no one previously had a glimmer of understanding about the world or our place in it or what was going on inside the kludge we call a brain. There must have been an Einstein in goat skins, or we would not have the wheel. Pythagoras, Archimedes, Galen, Gautama Buddha, Lao Tsu, to name a few ancients, Anselm, Abelard, Augustine, in the Middle Ages. In the arts, women, as well, produced history books, poems, and philosophy that are still read and studied today. At any rate, many people were thinking some pretty good thoughts before Descartes discovered himself “thinking.”

Hi, Natalie

A too strong focus on the unique approach of Descartes’ method of doubting the foundations of knowledge, and believe me, his bold, stark look at his mental processes cannot be underestimated, seems to overshadow what the pursuit of knowledge by pre-age-of-enlightenment thinkers were up to. There are obviously powerful forces at work in church and state to maintain the status quo, but there has, as far back as history can reveal, a spirit of intellectual freedom staking out a claim for human suffrage in prayer and petition. Our minds may create the reality around us. It is hard, even, to know if time flows forward or backward. We as an animal species are beset by problems, and our main defense in our war against obstacles is our ability to create concepts to solve them. Maybe we are making matters worse with our technology and conspiratorial thinking, but we struggle in the darkness with anger, ignorance,

and desire, and if we are ever to find happiness and the causes of happiness, right thinking, right understanding, and right speech are good ingredients.

Hi, Sekeun

You say, “I sometimes give up thinking deeply about difficult topics or debates because I just accept it as it is.” I’m with you there. This doubting everything that pops up can be exhausting. A lot of what confronts us might just as well be ignored. Making a judgement about every event or object or thought is unnecessary. Descartes is right about how, when we do make judgements, they are usually without much analysis or self-awareness. If we are going to break free of habitual tendencies and knee-jerk reactions and common herd thinking, it will require a bit more energy than just “blindly believing it.” Good luck with your enlightenment enterprise.

Hi, Niecia

Riffing off of Gertrude Stein, “Science discovers science discovers,” but I’m not sure it’s the truth it discovers. This is the troubling truth. A wiki elf tells me that Benjamin Franklin attached a metal key to a kite string and the sparks jumped from the key to the back of his hand showing him that lightning was indeed electrical in nature. He was damn lucky he didn’t electrocute himself. The first toaster was invented in 1893 by the Scottish inventor, Alan MacMasters. Utilizing electricity, this machine could toast bread; this is true. Elsewhere, the wiki elf says, “Electricity is the set of physical phenomena associated with the presence and motion of matter that has a property of electric charge...that it is related to magnetism, both being part of the phenomenon of electromagnetism, as described by Maxwell's equations.” I could relate more about electrical and magnetic fields, however, all I am attempting to show is that we have ever more complex descriptions and equations but no TRUTH. Good hunting for this elusive creature.

Hi, Eliza

Descartes needed to prove the existence of God or he very likely would have been tried as a heretic and burned at the stake. He cobbles together an argument from different sources, all of which had flaws (e.g. Anselm’s concept of God as the most Perfect Being, rejected because, if God is perfect, there can’t be anything else perfect or it would be a parody of God), but regardless of Descartes feeble ontological argument, he posits a Self (Mind) in a material universe. Unfortunately, this concept leads to a mind/body split in the determination of how we can know for sure if there is or is not a world outside the self. Kant, whom we will be studying, works on this problem and moves the Enlightenment Project to a more secure foundation.

Ah, Kate, having courage, that's what my lama told me was the key to my pursuit of contemplative stability. Of course, this kind of enlightenment cannot be attained using reason, but for everyday kinds of understanding, courage is a good component of the skeptical mind. David Hume, an Enlightenment Skeptic par Excellence, pointed out that we cannot know anything in an absolute way. The big questions, like what are the First Causes or Final Ends of events are impossible to determine, because all we can observe are sequences of events in the present. Whether or not the sun will rise tomorrow is open to speculation, but he concludes that it makes practical sense to assume that it will. I think Descartes would have agreed to this conclusion and still have doubted his way toward a better understanding of reality.

Miles, greetings, fellow truth-seeker

Hmmm, "iterative"—nice word; I haven't used it before. Repetitive. Testing over and over. I sat in meditational equipoise, repeating my tutelary deity's heart mantra one million times. Why? A yogic mind experiment of iterative rigor that enabled me to absorb the mind essence of my lama from afar. Why? One way to deconstruct the habitual tendencies of the mind to form memories and thought of times past and future projections is to fill it with vibrations based on bodily energy centers, called "chakras." This form of meditation involves visualization (the imagination) and "mudras" (hand movements), and "asanas" (bodily postures), and together the activities form a systematic way of transforming the self residing in an ego-centric, desire-driven position to arrive at a more discerning, compassionate locus that unifies the co-ordinates of both mind and body.

Yes, Stephanie, you nailed it. Only one problem, three hundred seventy and some odd years later, we still don't know anything for certain. A lot of conceptual thinking based on Descartes method has led to some amazing inventions (the internet is a fine example) and we have explored inner and outer space to some extent, but we are still floundering around in darkness when it comes to right behavior. The Covid Pandemic and the turmoil around vaccines and masking exposed how the Age of Enlightenment has not reached every corner of the polis. The arguments over Critical Race Theory and Gay Rights reveal how slow some segments of the population are to attain an enlightened world view. According to Quassim Cassam (*Conspiracy Theories*), the structural disjointedness of QAnon thinking is an extension of the Middle Ages' Blood Libel mixed with other occult conspiracies that have morphed into a propaganda tool of malign political forces undermining the Enlightenment principles on which our Republic is founded. Don't get me started.

Hello, Sophie

A wiki elf tells me: "*The Magic Flute* has been noted for its Masonic elements, although some scholars hold that the Masonic influence is exaggerated. Mozart was a Freemason, as was Ignaz Alberti, engraver and printer of the first libretto. The opera is also influenced by Enlightenment philosophy and can be regarded as advocating enlightened absolutism. The Queen of the Night is seen by some to represent a dangerous form of obscurantism, by others to represent Roman Catholic Empress Maria Theresa, who banned Freemasonry from Austria. Still others see the Roman Catholic Church itself, which was strongly anti-Masonic."

Freemasonry is a secret fraternal organization. I am a Past Worshipful Master of a Masonic lodge, and I can say that much of the lore dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> c. stonemasons and that the 18<sup>th</sup> c. "speculative" Masons entertained ideas circulated by the enlightenment philosophers. Many of the founding fathers of our country were freemasons and their assembled ideas are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Hi, Nelson

Good to wonder what's what. David Hume (my favorite Enlightenment philosopher) says our knowledge is composed of Ideas and Impressions. There's a lot of misinformation, disinformation, as well as harmless but unsupportable claims. Actually, when you think about what you know, you find that most "knowledge" is based on authority, and the authorities got their knowledge from other authorities, on down the line. What we get from sense impressions is also suspect. Time seems to flow forward when we are awake, backwards (or randomly) when we are asleep, and stop altogether when we meditate. So, what is Time? My favorite time is teatime.

Katherine

Yes, "complete detachment"—I felt that when I was dying—the bliss-emptiness of self and other deconstructed into intrinsic awareness within the universal source—pure mind in its original hyper-purity (Longchempa). Only, as I initiated the transfer mantra with the bindu of my consciousness poised on the lotus petal of my crown chakra, the obstructing hospital nurses restrained me, and I returned to the Bardo of the Living. Hi Ho.

T'Naya

Yesterday I died and again today, each moment is born, exists, and dissolves and is reborn to exist and die, ho hum, boring, really, but also so fulfilling—each thought full of unfathomable potential for good or evil, if free of grasping, can reveal and aid us on the path to enlightenment.

Hi, Meira

You mention how The Age of Enlightenment gave men the freedom to think for themselves, but it is important to recognize the role women played in this revolution. Enjoy your freedom. See the Wiki essay, "Women of the Enlightenment."

Hi, Luke

I like the double play on the word “reason.” God was there for a reason. Descartes’ imperfections happened for a reason. He reasoned all good things happened for a reason. Hmm...a cause, explanation, or justification for an action or event: NOUN: cause · grounds · ground · basis · rationale · motive · motivation. VERB: the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgments by a process of logic: rationality · logic · logical thought · scientific thinking · reasoning · thought · cognition · the mind. Descartes certainly tests our thinking power.

Hi, Allyssa

We are still surrounded by stifling structures controlling our thoughts and actions. The visionary poet William Blake (1757-1827) saw what the Age of Reason would lead to. “Mind-forged manacles” he called reason. He felt we were abandoning one prison for another, although he hoped America would be the New Jerusalem. And look at us, still arguing over superstitious nonsense because of petty nationalist rivalries. May we be blessed with more light.

## KANT AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) has a slogan: “*Sapere aude!*” which translated literally from Latin is “Dare to know” and has been read as a challenge to “Have courage to use your own reason.” The Age of Enlightenment encourages us to take advantage of our freedom to use reason in all matters, spiritual, social, political, and practical. To be effective in our use of reason, we must be aware that what is accepted as the standard “wisdom” (of only what we have been taught) might be false. Following in the footsteps of Descartes, Kant admonishes us to think for ourselves, but the idea that we should think for ourselves has risks. Philosophers had previously been burned at the stake for ideas that threatened the stability of church and state, and in Kant’s time (late 18th c.), they were still under threat of sedition and heresy if their ideas challenged accepted norms. Kant’s solution was for thinkers to stay within bounds. That everyone could be (indeed,

has a duty to be) a “scholar” and bring forth ideas to be debated. Kant does not believe that humankind will make much progress as isolated individuals, that the Enlightenment goals can only be accomplished collectively to change the body of knowledge and, in doing so, change the institutions.

Hi, Nelson

Kant is a moderate enlightenment thinker because he doesn't want to cause waves and upset the social apple cart. He wrote “What Is Enlightenment” in 1784. These were tumultuous times, the American Revolution just past and the French Revolution just about to happen. You can see his reason for worry. Still, he believed in the need for being able to think his thoughts, and think he did with rigor. What a philosopher! However, before you can publish or speak your thoughts in public, you had better have them organized, and this you do privately. We haven't studied Kant in depth, but he is famous for his critiques on how we know what we know. Kant's method concerning certitude in the study of knowledge (epistemology) is the erected foundation he built on the mental bedrock unearthed by Descartes. This takes us back to the work the individual must do before publishing or speaking their truth. The mind must be trained to think. Are we thinking? Can we doubt what we are learning, even as we learn?

Hi, Adriana, excellent answers to the questions posed.

Now, for a bit of critique by an old poet. Philosophers have a bias that they are the only holders of truth. Clear, concise, and original thinking, not clouded by imagination or dramatic nuance, is their bailiwick. They are cool and collected there amid the marble columns of their philosophical edifice. They proclaim: Beware of influences! Beware of false rhetoric! Yet, it would be impossible for me to write a word of this without having trusted my teachers in the process of learning to write, but once I got a handle on the way it's done, learned the rules, I could abandon the rules and speak in the tongue of angels, warbling my woodnotes with abandon. The same goes with the thinking of my thoughts. Got to have a few thoughts (opinions of others) before I can have some of my own to compare and contrast. I can then test my thoughts for consistency and clarity. What of original thought? That another matter entirely.

Hi, Sekeun

I like this going back to the Age of Enlightenment and listening to all this talk about thinking and reason and the rights to free speech and debate. Here we are, over two centuries later with a couple of freedom icons that are about to bring down the Republic. Free speech. Does this

include hate speech? Stupid speech? I suppose it's good to get it all out there, but Kant didn't own an assault weapon or believe the Italians were using Neptunian space rays to start forest fires. I wonder if he would believe that Facebook is an "essential element for progress"?

Hi, Eliza

We learn by imitation. A lot of what we learn is wrong. Some of it is ok. Some of it is right on. Hard to know, until life throws you a curve ball and knocks you out of the box. Then, the work begins. Courage and resolution are necessary, but they are not enough. NO ONE does this enlightenment thing on their own. This is the problem with the western, materialist approach. Half-baked. Looking outward for something that is within. Still, I'm glad for my social security check.

Hi, T'Naya

Kant was a dreamer, but he indicated that David Hume's skepticism "awakened" him from his dogmatic slumbers. Bertrand Russell, a modern philosopher, remarked that after being awakened, he immediately fell asleep again. I remember this witticism from reading Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, which I recommend to all.

Hi, Stephanie

I'm not sure our ignorance is self-imposed. I'm under the impression that humans are born ignorant, live in ignorance, and die ignorant. The idea that we can reason our way out of this ignorance is at best a hope. Bertrand Russell, one of the greatest logicians of all time, while lecturing on how beginning from a false premise, one can prove anything, was asked, "If  $2+2=5$ , prove you're the Pope." Russell, always quick of mind, replied, " $2+2=4$  or  $4=5$ . Subtract 3 from either side of the equation, and you have  $1=2$ . The Pope and I are two, therefore we are one." Can you see the trick he used to handle this conundrum? Russell was a public intellectual and very outspoken on all matters, political and social.

Hi, Briar

Your answers are right on. Perfect. Now, thinking for myself, in this module, I wonder if my understanding of what I'm thinking is from a freedom from within or freedom from without. I'm pretty sure I am free to think in safety, so long as no one is using psychic powers to eavesdrop. However, times have not changed much. I remember my University of California political science

professor being subpoenaed by the Un-American Activities Committee, in 1960, for discussing the pros as well as the cons of Communism. My daughter, today, teaches the History of Art, and the Tennessee legislature just passed a bill that if she teaches Critical Race Theory (at a school with a majority of Black students) that she can be personally sued if she makes anyone feel uncomfortable. Hard to teach the History of Black Art when you can't explain why Basquiat paints so many pictures of screaming Black men. I think of Spinoza (1632-1677) happily thinking his thoughts as he polished lenses. He is also, along with Descartes, considered a trailblazer of the Enlightenment. He had a radical concept of God (a substance that we can only know through mind and extension) that brought him the condemnation of every branch of religion and philosophy. Wow! Everyone hated him. Dare we tread in his footsteps?

Hi, Afton,

We are teetering, at this point in our classwork, between two concepts of "enlightenment." The Western approach uses reason to arrive at clear conclusions. Having smarts. But is this enough? Need to question this. Can we arrive at the nature of mind and of the nature of reality (whatever these are) through reason? The Eastern approach has us looking at our Mind, using a "third eye" to look at our looking that is a practice called meditation. Meditation is like sports: there are a lot of them, and they have different rules. Just as we learn by listening intently to our teachers of the humanities and the sciences, it is necessary to have a meditation teacher. The meditation teacher cannot enlighten you, but ze can point the way. The trick is to find a good one. As they say in my school: *All Blessings Flow from the Lama*. The work, then, falls to you. The meditation, too, is only a vehicle, a scaffolding, that you finally leave behind. Mine is a leaking boat. Hope I arrive safely.

Hi, Meira

"Release" is a perfect word for this liberation from shackles, both in the E and W traditions. Freedom from darkness. Clear light. Going beyond beyond: *Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*.

Hi, Taifa, yes, on both counts, but can we maintain a public space where we can entertain the blessings of freedom to speak our thoughts? This seems to be a perennial problem in a Democratic Republic.

Hi, Liam

I'm wondering about this Kantian question about private enlightenment. True enough for the use of scholastic reasoning, I suppose, but what about working on one's knowledge for the sake of knowledge on the path to wisdom (that other kind of "enlightenment")? Does an enlightened one have a responsibility to enlighten one's neighbors? Hmm, this idea might be a product of Protestant evangelism in the West. Buddha said, "I only teach suffering (*duhkha*). Where there is suffering there is a problem. Where there is no suffering, there is no problem." In other words, one problem at a time. The Path of the Bodhisattva, the Spiritual Hero, who helps everyone with a grand plan, this evolves later, a little after the time of Christ, with Nagarjuna (c. 150-250), who proposed the idea that the individual aspirant to enlightenment must not attain full dissolution of consciousness but return through future lifetimes until everyone has attained enlightenment. Even the last blade of grass.

## ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE EAST

The action or state of attaining or having attained spiritual knowledge or insight, in particular (in Buddhism) that awareness which frees a person from the cycle of rebirth: "The key to enlightenment is the way of the Buddha" (bing.com).

The English term enlightenment is the Western translation of various Buddhist terms, most notably *bodhi* and *vimutti*. The abstract noun *bodhi* (/ˈboʊdhi/; Sanskrit: बोधि; Pali: *bodhi*), means the knowledge or wisdom, or awakened intellect, of a Buddha. The verbal root *budh-* means "to awaken," and its literal meaning is closer to awakening. (Wikipedia: "Enlightenment in Buddhism")

OK, fine, and then Padmasambava (known as The Second Buddha), a 9th c. Tibetan Tantric Master, says "Samsara (the world of suffering) and Nirvana (the cessation of suffering) are concepts of the mind." What is one to make of this?

"The Cuckoo's Song of Gnosis" by Vairotsana (*Eye of the Storm: Vairotsana's Five Original Transmissions*, translation and commentary by Keith Dowman, Vajra Publications, Kathmandu, 2006, p. 1):

The nature of multiplicity is nondual  
and things in themselves are pure and simple;  
being here and now is construct-free  
and it shines out in all forms, always all good;  
it is already perfect, so exertion is redundant

and spontaneity is immanent.

Dowman's commentary:

*All experience, the entire phantasmagoria of the six senses, the diverse multiplicity of existence, in reality is without duality. Even if we examine the parts of the pure essence of mind in the laboratory of the mind, such specifics are seen to be illusive and indeterminant. There is nothing to grasp and no way to express it. The suchness of things, their actuality, left just as it is, is beyond thought and inconceivable and that is the here and now...Total perfection has always been a fact and there has never been anything to do to actuate this immaculate completion. All endeavor is redundant. What remains is spontaneity and that is always present as our natural condition.*

I can relate to the life of the Buddha from personal experience. I was raised with privileges. I got a primo education back in those old days when America was supposed to be so great. I studied the hard sciences and the soft sciences along with the humanities. I read Virgil in Latin. I "tuned in, turned on, and dropped out" in the '60s and became a Hippie. I brushed up against Zen Buddhists, Hindu Yogis, and Sufi Mystics. I studied the Occult, as well. I became a New Age bookseller. But, for many years, the most spiritual practice I did was to smoke pot and chant OM. Then, in 1989, I met my first Tibetan Lama and started to meditate in the Tantric (Vajrayana) tradition. I discovered that I got more out meditation retreats than I did from conventional vacations. I accumulated three-full years of practice in retreat over a period of twenty years visiting Tara Mandala Retreat Center ([taramandala.org](http://taramandala.org)) and decided I wanted to do the rigorous, traditional three-year solitary mountain retreat. I found a Vajra Master. To prepare, I did extensive Ngöndro, Chöd, and Prajnaparamita practices before I was sealed in to accomplish the *Dzinpa Rongdröl* (Natural Liberation from Clinging and Attachment), a *terma* (mind-treasure) of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje (1800-1866). And now, I'm back studying "What Is Enlightenment" with you guys. Why? Life is a chair of bowlies.

Hi, Katherine

In your last paragraph, the word "detachment" needs a bit of cool whip sprayed on it. No one is getting out of thinking entirely, until they are dead. Then, we are really detached, although even then, there is the continuation of something called the mindstream. In meditation, one relaxes while watching their breathing, and the mental activity becomes calmer. If you can develop the technique of looking at a thought as it occurs, while not attaching to it, not following it into the past or into the future, just sitting with it in the here-and-now, it self-liberates itself. Wow! In one breath you become a Mahasiddha!

Hi, Katherine

Yes, “non-attachment” is used more these days, American Buddhism is a new direction for Western thinkers, Philosophically, it's been around since the 18th c. but only practiced in a meaningful way in America (with the exception of the Japanese and Chinese) since WWII, with the arrival of a few Zen Masters from Japan. The then fashionable western philosophical school of Existentialism was mixed in to make a heady stew for Beatnik intellectuals. Eastern philosophy, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, often posit a negative at the beginning of an argument, “everything suffers” or answering, “not that!” which is contrary to the more optimistic western approach. What I’m getting at is that it is hard to literally detach from thinking. Thinking is a brain function. It is the symbolization of sense impressions. We use it for lots of things, and there are many kinds: adding and subtracting, measuring, reasoning with logic, imagining unicorns, dreaming of a perfect vacation, praying to God, writing poetry. However, if you want to touch the ground consciousness, that is, consciousness without the monkey mind of word babble, it requires discipline to settle the dust. Muddy water in a glass will become clear, if the glass is not shaken.

Relax, T’Naya, no terror in the nature of Buddhamind. And nothing “permanent” either. The beauty of the teaching on impermanence is the freedom it brings, not to be stuck in conceptual boxes and dualistic torture chambers. “Ego death” is only a preparation for real death. If the ego was never born, how can it die? No need to be sentimental about the loss of something that didn’t exist in the first place :)

Hi, Adriana

Buddhism is a religion, now. Gautama Buddha was born into the Hindu faith. He was the son of a Brahmin, perhaps a king’s son. His father feared he would go astray, as fathers do. A prophecy said the boy would become either a great king or an avatar, and his father wanted him to be a king, so he protected him from the outside world. Well, you know the story. In a sense, Buddhism can be compared to Protestantism in that it breaks away from the existing church structure. Hinduism has a caste system and is firmly entrenched in a sort of fatalism. Protestants believe you can speak to God directly and that through good works you can get to heaven. Buddha discovered that one can attain liberation from the wheel of karma in this lifetime. Others had done it, but he was the first who could teach a path to Enlightenment. No need for a god’s intervention. Just mind training. Cool. A bit more about reality and the mind: right understanding includes the world as well as the self, and suffering pertains to all life, plants as well as animals. It is not enough to discover that the self is empty. The teachings of the Prajraparamitra Sutra reveal that reality is

empty also.

Hi, Nelson

There are some great knowledge holders in the Buddhist tradition, but you are right that what is sought is more of a “connection” with yourself, if by “self” you mean the nature of mind. “Spiritual” is a word that gets bandied about without a clear definition. Buddha is very concrete in what he is talking about. You might say that it is a tangible sort of emptiness. Experiential. In this way, his approach to accomplishing enlightenment is quite scientific.

Hi, Allyssa

Buddhism is still going strong. There are scientists that are Buddhists. Western psychology has taken many of Buddha’s ideas to heart. I teach meditation to clinical psychologists. It’s part of their toolkit. The Big Bang resonates with Buddhist cosmologists. Something from nothing. Some of the greatest logicians have been Buddhists. The five-value system has been around for a long time. The either/or form of Aristotelean logic we use in the law of contradiction (that if something is A, it cannot be Not A at the same time) is difficult to sustain in matters outside the material world as described by Newton. The eight-fold path contains a strong logical and experiential foundation and is applied with the rigor of scientific method.

Your answers to the question are fine. I only meant to fine tune them a bit. This western concept that we will find happiness with more knowledge and reason is one approach to our human condition. A good one, it just needs some balance with our other faculties, like imagination and self-insight. The middle-way requires both Knowledge and Wisdom.

Hi, Liam

I checked out the last link you posted ([learnreligions.com](http://learnreligions.com)) and note that the idea that you leave the world when “there is nothing left to live for in the world” comes from the Theravada tradition, whereas no Buddha who has Mahayana vows will leave until everyone is enlightened. This has been a stupid sticking point for a couple of millennia, once Nagarjuna had proposed the Bodhisattva concept. It is an old argument among Buddhist schools based upon a time when a group of scholars did not show up at a Buddhist Woodstock Event. The schools (The Greater and Lesser Vehicles) are closer together today.

• • •

Whether Buddhist Enlightenment is permanent or not is still up to debate in Buddhist circles. You

can see why Buddha didn't want to say much about something that can't be put into words. My take is that we can step off the Wheel of Karma at any time, if we are enlightened. Those who have taken Bodhisattva vows and keep them will return until every last blade of grass is liberated. It may take a while.

When I left my cabin (Luminous Peak) in the mountains, I was asked if I had attained enlightenment. If I answered yes, it would indicate that I had bought into some concept; if I answered no, it would demean my accomplishment. So, I smiled.

## PART II: ENLIGHTENED NATURE

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 (-*logía*) '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.

. . .

Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and other Age of Enlightenment philosophers believe that the use of reason and knowledge of nature will allow scientists to control the forces that affect our natural environment (New Science). Viewing nature as separate from humankind led to the exploitation of nature's resources during the Industrial Revolution, and that, in turn, (aided by a capitalistic mindset based on the profit motive) led to our present-day consumer society and an increasingly devastated planet. Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022) sees consumer society as a root cause of suffering and admonishes us to awake from the "American Dream."

For American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892), nowness is the eternal moment—there is no past or future—only always and always the now. Ze is each and every thing and all things are hir.

#### "Song of Myself" (31)

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,  
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,  
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,  
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,  
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,  
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,  
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

For Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), all actions that treat persons as merely a means to an end (without taking into consideration their well-being) is morally wrong. This is known as the "categorical Imperative" (*Critique of Practical Reason*). For Hanh, we have an ethical responsibility to treat nature as a living being. If a person has an inherent value, so does nature, and to use nature's resources indiscriminately and do violence to the Earth is to do violence to ourselves.

## THOUGHTS ON ENLIGHTENED NATURE

Hi, T'Naya

Your last post touched me. Regarding your daughter, your choice to save her was very natural, an intuitive act of wisdom. Your worry about creating a “carbon footprint” is in another sphere of debate. With our dualistic mind, we tend to go to extremes in our judgements. The science was there to save her, and you saved her. Here is another Buddhist Teaching, known as The Middle Way.

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 6 Perfections: Generosity, Patience, Discipline, Diligence, Concentration, and Wisdom. It is towards these transcendental perfections that one practices the Eight-fold Path. As my mother 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 biproduct 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 *-vios*, 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 is 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 done. 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 (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 signlessness. 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 Nhat 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 cacophonic 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.

## 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, abolition 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 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.forestryresearch.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](https://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.

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 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 Buddhis 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 Nhat 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.

## PART III: DISCRIMINATION

### TWO CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN

Julia Child (1912-2004) was an American cooking teacher, author, and television personality, and Betty Friedan (1921-2006) was an American feminist writer and activist. A leading figure in the women's movement in the United States, her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited with sparking the second wave of American feminism in the 20th century (Wiki). In a recent HBO series, *Julia* (S1 E7), Julia Child is confronted by Betty Friedan, who accuses Julia of propagating and solidifying a stereotypical image of the American housewife, slaving away in the kitchen. She is accused of making matters even worse by importing difficult-to-make French dishes that take up any free time the housewife might have for childrearing or even any personal time to herself. Earlier in the episode, Julia is confronted by a famous French chef who insists that cooking is a man's preserve and to cease and desist. One can sense that times were 'a changing. On the one hand, Julia Child invented the TV Cook Show and broke barriers in the male establishment, and on the other hand, she was chastised for perpetuating the patriarchy. She had an odd personality. She was generous and genuine.

*Queen of the South* (2021) is an American crime drama television series on Netflix. Alice Braga brilliantly portrays the character, Teresa Mendoza, a poor woman from Sinaloa, Mexico, who becomes wealthy by building a vast drug empire. The story is fiction, but it accurately (based on a well-researched novel by Arturo Pérez-Reverte) documents how women are dominated and forced into slavery as drug runners and prostitutes in the criminal underground of Mexican and American society. Spoiler: true to Hollywood-style movies, it has a happy ending. Bon Appetit!

Katherine Camarata

Hi, Jampa,

I love the paradox you highlighted, that women can't ever win. You do exactly what you want, and it just so happens to align with more traditional roles as was the case with Julia Childs, and she's somehow the scorn of feminism. She clearly was doing what she wanted regardless of these opinions, and I'm glad she did because nobody should have to be more masculine unless they truly want to be. They deserve the choice! Modern women are sort of expected to be both career women fulfilling more masculine roles, as well as excellent mothers and caregivers.

Women have so often only been vessels for children or sexual escape or drugs. It makes me enraged for my ancestors. I'm happy to see women doing more of what they want, but I wonder how will this impact how women relate to men? I also wonder if the gender binary will become significantly uncommon.

Hi, Kama

I, too, wonder if gender differences will ever become obsolete. Here are views from three genders from my *Collected Poems 1961-2000*:

#### HYMN OF HIM

In a previous life, I was Sultan Almansur  
And I had three hundred wives, all pure.  
I did everything I could contrive to keep  
My brides satisfied. In this, with modest  
Success, I took pride.  
Some sultans first take the maiden head  
And then cut off the maiden's head  
When they are through. I can think of one  
Of mine, or two, who deserved the blade  
Which my conscience forbade.  
A new wife each night is both a curse  
And a delight. I was careful not to  
Favor one and incur the harem's spite.  
With age, I turned my duties over  
To my eldest son, and then  
I lived my final days, grateful that  
I could reflect and pray, and I thanked  
The Great Progenitor for my many lays.  
In lovemaking I was truly blessed  
And lucky now to get some rest.

#### CAN HE HEAR HER?

He wants to know my birth time for an astrological chart.  
I thought I knew where I had put my birth certificate,  
but when I look, I can't find it, although I find the kids'  
Social Security cards and the numbers I need for my loan.

He's says a Gemini generally has a lot of boyfriends  
and goes steady with one or more each week, says I'm  
searching for a soulmate or another side to myself.

He's older and wise with intense blue eyes.

He's laid back against the door of my closet  
and holds a glass of white wine, twirling the liquor  
in the glass with the Gemini twins painted in gold  
and tells me what I need in a lover.

This guy is hot for me and waits on me hand and foot.  
I'm chain-smoking generic lights and can hardly breathe.  
I'm weirded out.  
I can feel the bones of my skull in my head.  
I wish I could dissolve into nothing in peace.

ZE HE HER HIR IT THEY: AS ABOVE SO BELOW

There's somewhere I want to go,  
and so. I cruise the limits of the visible.  
I feel the barrier, weird yet familiar  
to my touch—is this a warning?

A car burns beside the road  
where I meet the guardians of the way,  
an old woman throwing bones in the dust,  
a young man rolling stones on a board.  
“Who are you?” he asks, “Elven queen,  
white witch, she who has trouble  
making up her mind?” If I pass, I know

I cannot return, but what more can I lose?

The wind carries me—I change.

I have no eyes. I have no sex.

I dance to the rhythm of the stars,  
a dance that is older than love.

Hi, Afton

You are clearly awake to the problem of sexism. The way men and women relate to one another is complicated to say the least. There are many layers to personal and social relationships, and the strong binary attraction/repulsion valences play out in the home, the workplace, the church, and on the dance floor.

Sex is determined by DNA, whereas gender is based on culturally accepted norms, attitudes, or behaviors that are typical for males or females. Gender identity has to do with our inner sense of who we are. The path to discovering "who we are" is difficult to traverse. The Bible relates two separate creation scenes: in *Genesis* 1:27, God creates man and woman at the same time in His image, and in *Genesis* 2:22, God creates man first, and from a rib of man, he creates woman. My take on this is that if man and woman are both created at the same time in God's image, "He" must be a hermaphrodite, and man and woman must be equally divine in status. The second version implies woman is secondary and inferior to man. Why do we believe the second version and not the first?

Hi, Surafel

Yes, there are "hidden persuaders" in advertisements, not only in the media, but in clothes we wear, the cars we drive, our hairdos and the words we use. These SIGNS that trigger our neuro-synapses and get us excited when we encounter the multi-varied MENUS we encounter in the jungle of our daily lives are not only put in place by Madison Avenue but by Mother Nature & Co.

Somehow, without an Instruction Manual, we are left to our own devices to figure out how to operate this kludge we call a brain. Even when we shift roles with women, doing the housework and letting her bring home the caribou, we (I, a cis male) feel alienated. When I was living with a Tibetan family in Santa Fe, I wasn't allowed to help with the dishes. Even as a monk in robes, the "woman's work" was off limits. My experiences with the Oglala Sioux during the Sundance were the same. In the '60s, it was the Hippies that became woke. If we are to have EQUAL RIGHTS it

means that we can share the workload, whether if it is walking high steel or cleaning toilets.

Hi, Mackenzie

Indeed, changes must be made.

Andre Lorde, in her comments at the Second Sex Conference in New York, in 1979, pointed to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender roles, along with racial and multi-cultural considerations, as missing elements of the feminist dialogue. Today, in this compartment, society has shifted. Still, differences between white, gentrified women and men of European descent barely does justice to the overall problem. And believing with Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who, in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) that once women have been properly educated and have developed equal virtues they can return to their traditional roles with supposedly higher rank and respect is only a chimera of freedom from patriarchal control (*Feminist Philosophy Reader*, 2001, p. 128). Lorde's insight that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" is a critique of the view of how change can be implemented. To quote Lorde, "As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change," and she claims that different strengths can "spark" creativity (*FPR*, p. 50). By extension, not only is recognition and utilization of difference necessary, but women should use whatever tools are available in whatever way is possible.

Katherine Camarata

Sexism is still prominent in the world in many ways, often passed down from generation to generation in the home resulting in an overall bias against women or in favor of men. Traditions in the home, at times based upon doctrines from religions like Catholicism, Islam, or Mormonism, regard men as more capable of contacting God or achieving certain depths of spiritual awareness. Typically, in the Catholic faith, women are not allowed to become priests- they are able to become nuns. However, nuns don't lead church services. This disparity feels so antiquated. Women are capable of achieving psychic/spiritual awakenings to the same degree as men, and in the U.S. may be more likely to achieve this as a result of feeling free to express emotion.

Women's rights and autonomy are still being infringed upon in jarring ways. On Tuesday, a reporter I work with at The Observer interviewed anti-abortion protestors outside the SURC; I helped write an article about the sign-holders from Tiny Heartbeat Ministries and the counter-protestors on the pro-choice side. The people standing with Tiny Heartbeat Ministries held graphic images of aborted fetuses. They handed out pamphlets that drew similarities between abortion, the Holocaust and slavery. The ignorance of these parallels is hard to imagine sharing

so openly. The signs show such a lack of compassion to me, as though they are going to suddenly awaken women to the reality of abortion, many of whom have likely experienced this trauma firsthand and don't need to be confronted by this imagery to understand what the experience is. This assumption is infuriating and sexist, because women are educated enough to know what they are choosing without the help of ministers with unknown credentials showing worst case scenario photos for shock value at a space of learning. Have they ever changed anybody's mind with these methods? If so, I really would like to meet this type of person to understand more about their perspective. Women should have the right to choose, whether we agree with their choices or not.

On a global scale, sexism is seen when women are regarded as objects punishable by men's violence for stepping outside of gender roles or challenging oppression, as can be the case in India.

"In an interview in the 2015 documentary *India's Daughter*, directed by Leslie Udwin, Mukesh Singh, one of the men convicted for the 16 December 2012 gang-rape and murder in Delhi, justifies the rape on the grounds that the victim had overstepped the lines of prescribed gender roles and feminine morality. His lawyer echoed the same victim-blaming sentiments, boasting that he would burn his daughter alive if she were to behave in a dishonorable way." (<https://sur.conectas.org/en/rape-culture-and-sexism-in-globalising-india> (Links to an external site.)) "Rape culture" and "victim-blaming" are problems women face in India, where "honour killings" target women who are supposedly violating some essential moral code. If women are being murdered for not being "womanly" enough, feminism has a long way left to go.

Hi, Kama

You didn't think the Kali Yuga Age was going to be easy, did you? Lots of work ahead.

After reading Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (*Feminist Philosophy Reader*, 2001), I begin to question whether or not, not only gender, but the body itself might be a cultural construct. I'm reminded of something one of my lamas said about the metaphysical foundation of the world (in its physical sense) resting on an elephant which rests upon a tortoise, and when asked what the tortoise rested on he said, "It's tortoises all the way down." The study of gender for me, at the moment, is the metaphysics of metaphysics, and the field theory of play is a means to ease, unify, and harmonize tensions, dissonance, and contradictions in the polarities of the body, voice, and mind. Outwardly, I can join the camp parade, but inwardly I must deconstruct my gendered self; and as a tantric yogi, I know there is a path. Have courage.

Hi, T'Naya

My solution to the clothing dilemma has been to wear robes. One size fits all. No pockets. Carry a bag. More people are beginning to play with or deconstruct their gender identities. In *Gender Outlaws* (1994), Kate Bornstein asks, "Where's the fun?" and quotes a Zen poet: "All roads in life lead nowhere. So, you might as well take the road that has the most heart and is the most fun." She posits "high camp" behavior as an effective way to bring about change in the self and in society: "High camp can be a man in full nun drag, with great showgirl makeup, on roller-skates in the middle of town. Does that man really want to be a nun?" and goes on: "Camp can be a leading edge in the deconstruction of gender, because camp wrests social control from the hands of fanatics. Camp in fact reclaims gender and re-shapes it as a consensual game." As a monk in robes, I learned to swish.

Hi, Chris

I'm lucky to be able to shift my gender identity from "he" to "it" to "they" and back to "he." I'm a "world-traveler," who stayed at home in America.

World-traveling is a form of play that assists in the reshaping of gender identity by traveling to other experiences of life-style and consciousness. The term "world-traveling" I take from Mariá Lugones' essay, "Playfulness, 'world'-travelling, and loving perception." She admits to "worlds" that one cannot enter playfully, nor would want to, but there are "worlds" that we can travel to lovingly, and travelling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that travelling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their "world" we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes (*Feminist Philosophy Reader*, p. 79). I am a cis-male (three times married with great-grandchildren) who has deconstructed his gender identity into five personae. Makes life much easier when dealing with the OTHER.

Hi, Stephanie

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) argued for the common good of all, for equality, justice, and liberty, but he clung to a bias that women were not on par with men in the intellectual realm. He believed that the compatibility of roles for men and women were rooted in nature. His contemporary, Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), argued in her "Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen" (1791) that the high ideals of the French Revolution did not extend to women. During the Reign of Terror (1793-1794), she was executed for her blasphemy.

It is said, "She approached the scaffold with a calm and serene expression on her face, and forced the guillotine's furies, which had driven her to this place of torture, to admit that such courage and beauty had never been seen before...She threw herself body and soul into the Revolution..." (Wiki). What a woman!

There is talk of legislation to make peoples' salaries transparent. This would help expose the hypocrisy of non-equal pay for equal work. The voltage The Age of Enlightenment produced to enhance the Rights of Women gave a dim light. Today, after 250 years of struggle, women are lighting charged.

Hi, Sophie

Gender is not stable (Butler, *Feminist Philosophical Reader*, 2001, p. 97) and is therefore the perfect playground for personal transformation. As a high camp group having fun breaking down barriers, Bornstein referenced the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, street-performers in San Francisco, who began dressing in drag as Catholic nuns, and whose original appearance now includes exaggerated make-up that accentuates their rebellion against gender roles. Fausto-Sterling (*FPR*, 132) suggest that ultimately, concepts of masculinity and femininity might overlap so completely as to render the very notion of gender difference irrelevant and, she references Roshblatts' chromatic system that differentiates hundreds of different personality types which could translate into "shades of gender" (*FPR* 133). By including myself in a transgender community (transgendered defined here as including neutral, chaste monks) I belong to a larger community than when I am a lone, wandering yogi-monk. And if I come out from being a monk and still wear my robes, which is fine with the Buddhist community, am I now cross-dressing?

Hi, Luke

Most of my responses to posts have been off the mark. Maybe intentionally, as women's rights is a volatile subject for men to enter the dialogue. "Get your hands off our bodies!" seems to be the mantra, other than "Give us our Rights!" Where is the middle ground? Radicals to the left of me, radicals to the right of me, and nowhere else to turn. Even if I go to the most traditionalist side of the spectrum, say the Taliban, or the Tibetans (whom I'm more familiar with) there are disagreements between the men on how women should behave, and believe me they get input from the women, in the household at the table and in bed. There are liberal views and conservative views, just like in America between women in the Blue camp and in the Red camp and within those camps, as well. Does the woman's body trump the fetus? Who owns the Soul? Is God watching?

We all have a stake in the ontological configuration of evolution of the species because we are interconnected. I have participated in three abortions. Once, I paid for a friend's abortion; in another, I assisted in the procedure with my wife; and on a third occasion I gave my permission to my pregnant girlfriend. These were not accidental acts; they were intentional. In an accidental act, according to my Buddhist belief, I do not have as much karmic connection, but in an intentional act, I involve myself with the other person's karma. In the case of an abortion, there are two sentient beings involved (not both of whom are persons) who are influenced as interbeings with my actions. In scientific terms, the body of a human being is a mass of molecules that make up flesh; from a Deep Ecology perspective, we are just meat to be eaten in the food chain—even in the *Upanishads*, God says, “I am the eater of the eater of food”; from a Christian perspective, we have souls that are pure and bodies that are vile; from a Buddhist transmigration perspective, if anything survives death, it is the mindstream (whatever that is). DO NOT KILL. Period. However, even the Dalai Lama says, “Sometimes, the mouse must go.” It’s a messy mess no matter how you look at it.

Hi, Adriana

Democracy is messy. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, who is a devout Catholic, is prevented from taking Communion by her Archbishop. She is a Senator from California, a traditionally liberal state, where the majority of citizens are pro-women-rights. What a bind! She has an oath to represent her constituency and a powerful man prevents her from sharing or exchanging intimate thoughts and feelings with God, a sacrament that is one of the few places in her religion where she can have a direct connection without going through a priest.

The message should be amplified: “Keep your hands off my body and keep your damn hands off my soul as well.”

GOP Georgia gubernatorial candidate Kandiss Taylor denounces separation of church and state, claiming: "Don't talk to me about separation of church and state. Church and state was written because the state has no business in our church. But we are the church. We are the church, and we run the state." <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/as-pelosi-denied-communion-by-bishop-what-pope-said-on-refusing-eucharist/ar-AAxYXsc?ocid=uxbndlbing>

The Founders emphasized the separation of church and state after 300 years of war between Catholics and Protestants and the subjection of religious rights, leading to the exodus of many Protestant sects to America. The Constitution of the US was to remedy this. Now, it is the other way around with a minority ruling from the pulpit (or the bench) as to what secularists can do. As one commentator pointed out: The slogan on the website of GOP Kandiss Taylor reads “Jesus Guns Babies” and says she’s an educator with two decades of experience, but for some reason

she chose not to put commas after “Jesus” or “Guns.”

<https://www.newsweek.com/gop-candidate-says-we-are-church-we-run-state-viral-video-1696729>

Hi, Ethan

We are in the vanguard of human rights for women, although the Scandinavian countries, where Socialism is an economic structure, and a matriarchic home structure is prevalent, is ahead of us. There is legislation heading towards Congress to make salaries of all citizens transparent. This would reveal the hypocrisy of the sham of the present equal pay for equal work based on ability and help to put forward a true version of Marx’s paradigm.

<https://money.com/pay-transparency-laws-employers-share-salaries/>

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/equal-pay-protections>

Hi, Meira

I have shared in the raising of four children. It is work but worth it. I have not carried to term a baby, but I have delivered one. It is work but worth it. I have also delivered a miscarriage of one of “my” children. It was disheartening. I have buried my first born, who only lived into her 30s. Also, disheartening. I have participated in three abortions. Once, I paid for a friend’s abortion; in another, I assisted in the procedure with my wife; and on a third occasion I gave my permission to my pregnant girlfriend. These were not accidental acts; they were intentional. In an accidental act, according to my Buddhist belief, I do not have as much karmic connection, but in an intentional act, I involve myself with the other person’s karma. In the case of an abortion, there are two sentient beings involved (not both of whom are persons) who are influenced as interbeings with my actions. We all have a stake in the ontological configuration of evolution of the species because we are interconnected. Life is a messy mess. May all sentient beings find happiness and the causes of happiness.

Hi, Briar, with regards to your idea: “With many sexist men saying that they do these things to ‘protect’ women when reality it is engrained in many of our societies that women ever needed this ‘protection’ in the first place.” This subject is a serious one. I’m not trying to be flippant, but here is an idea that would help in the unwanted baby department. Men should get a vasectomy at birth and reverse it when the time is right. That’s how men could really “protect” women.

<https://cornellsun.com/2021/10/01/baran-all-men-should-get-vasectomies-at-birth/>

<https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/evan-rachel-wood-suggests-mandatory-vasectomies-for-men-in-wake-of-new-abortion-laws-lets-save-lives-145138916.html>

In his famous essay “What Is Enlightenment,” Immanuel Kant defines enlightenment as our emergence from self-imposed ignorance. He uses the term nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. He says we need courage to think outside of the box and ignore what has previously been said. One must question the world and find answers for oneself. Kant distinguishes between “public” and “private” uses of reasons. Unlike Spinoza, who wished only for the freedom to think his own thoughts, Kant feels the essential element of enlightenment is the public use by everyone being a scholar disseminating their knowledge.

In general, the Buddhist concept of enlightenment is the ultimate knowledge of the emptiness of self and other. This is known as nirvana, the release from samsara, the realm of suffering. In the Dzogchen tradition this is called rigpa, an understanding of the ground nature of mental phenomena; its opposite is ma rigpa (ignorance). With an understanding of the nature of mind, one can transcend attachment and clinging to things because one realizes their essence is empty and their manifestation, transient.

Western science and philosophy explore the world and the self with the use of reason and empirical methodologies. Eastern enlightenment practitioners, through the use of meditation, seek to understand their inner being and reach an understanding of their interbeing with the world of objects. As the 9th c. Indian Guru and Exorcist, Padmasabhava, told Yeshe Tsogyal, “Samsara and nirvana are both concepts of the mind” (*Dakini Teachings*, Rangjung Yeshe Publications, Hong Kong, 1999). In this view, there is no “enlightenment” per se; and, whether there is or not, a Bodhisattva must return again and again, until all sentient beings are liberated.

## RACISM

A foundational Buddhist concept is dependent origination, meaning, at the most profound level, all life is interconnected and that nothing exists in isolation. In his 1993 Harvard University lecture, “Hierarchies Desecrate the Sanctity of Life,” the Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda explains the Buddhist notion of the interrelationship of all things:

Each living thing manifests the enlightenment of which it is capable; each contributes to the harmony of the grand concert of symbiosis. In Buddhist terminology, dependent origination describes these relationships. No person or thing exists in isolation. Every being functions to create the environment that sustains all other existences. All things are mutually supporting and interrelated, forming a living cosmos, what modern philosophy might term a semantic whole. That is the conceptual framework through which Mahayana Buddhism views the natural universe.

Or, in the words of Jesus, “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (*Matthew 7:12*). If people misunderstand what Thich Nhat Hanh calls their “interbeing” with others, society flounders because relationships are inharmonious.

Ikeda continues: The pathology of divisiveness drives people to an unreasoning attachment to difference and blinds them to human commonalities. This is not limited to individuals but constitutes the deep psychology of collective egoism, which takes its most destructive form in virulent strains of ethnocentrism and nationalism (<https://buddhability.org/purpose/buddhism-rejects-racism-in-any-form/>). Thus, racism violates a fundamental concept in Buddhism.

## SEXISM

Buddhist women, including nuns, continue to face discrimination by Buddhist institutions in Asia. Some claim it is a flaw in women pointed out by Gautama Buddha at the beginning of his ministry, when he claimed that allowing women into the sangha would cause his teachings to survive only half as long, 500 years instead of a 1,000. Early scriptures also say that some of the first Buddhist nuns were praised by the Buddha for their wisdom, and several became enlightened. In the Third Turning of the Wheel (Dzogchen), women are said to be better adepts at attaining enlightenment. There is gender inequality in most religions, but can Buddhism treat women as equals?

The Vinaya-pitaka records the rules for monks and nuns. One of the rules includes the total subordination of nuns to monks. However, can women attain enlightenment? There is no unified doctrinal authority that speaks for all Buddhism. The various schools do not use the same scriptures, and the scriptures disagree. According to Barbara O'Brien, a Zen Buddhist practitioner, author of *Rethinking Religion: Finding a Place for Religion in a Modern, Tolerant, Progressive, Peaceful and Science-affirming World* (2014): “*The Larger Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra*, also called the *Aparimitayur Sutra*, is one of three sutras that provide the doctrinal basis of the Pure Land school. This sutra contains a passage usually interpreted to mean that women must be reborn as men before they can enter Nirvana. This opinion pops up in time to time in other Mahayana scriptures, although I'm not aware of it being in the Pali Canon. On the other hand, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* teaches that maleness and femaleness, like other phenomenal distinctions, are essentially unreal. ‘With this in mind,’ the Buddha said, ‘in all things, there is neither male nor female.’ The *Vimalakirti* is an essential text in several Mahayana schools, including Tibetan and Zen Buddhism.”

<https://www.learnreligions.com/buddhism-and-sexism-449757> and  
<https://www.learnreligions.com/maha-pajapati-and-the-first-nuns-449897>

## ALL CAN AQUIRE THE DHARMA

Many women have earned accolade for their accomplishment of dharma. I study under the guidance of Lama Tsultrim Allioni. She has founded Tara Mandala Retreat Center, in Colorado [www.taramandala.org](http://www.taramandala.org) Her book *Women of Wisdom* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984) examines the experiences of Buddhism through the lens of the biographies of six Tibetan female

mystics. It celebrates the spiritual potential of all women (and men) as exemplified by the accomplishment of these women practitioners.

In a testimonial on the back of *Advice from the Lotus Born* (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1994), Tulku Urgen Rinpoche (from his *Introductory Teachings*) says, “The chief compiler of Padmasambhava’s teachings was Yeshe Tsogal, an emanation of a female Buddha. There may be some people who believe that only men can attain enlightenment, but her life is proof to the opposite. The awakened state of mind is neither male nor female.”

Today, Buddhist women in the West generally consider institutional sexism to be vestiges of Asian culture that can be eliminated from the buddhadharma. In the East, nuns work for better conditions, and there is movement toward equality. <https://www.learnreligions.com/buddhism-and-sexism-449757>

In Tibetan Buddhism (*Vajrayana*), the idea of the unity of opposites is a fundamental principle. Tibetan paintings (*thangkas*) represent the male and female in sexual congress (*yab yum*). Usually, the male faces outward with the female facing him with her head turned to the side, but the opposite configuration occasionally occurs, too. The male symbol is a thunderbolt scepter (*dorje*), representing skillful means, and the female symbol is a hand bell (*shang*), that represents wisdom, as manifested in bliss-emptiness. In ritual practice the dorje is held in the right hand at the heart, and the bell is rhythmically rung with the left hand. At certain times in the meditational practice, the hands holding the bell and dorje cross and symbolize the union of male and female energies. There are secret Tantric yoga rituals where a form of sexual intercourse (without ejaculation) is practiced that give the adepts a fleeting glimpse of the enlightenment experience. These kinds of practices are found in Hindu and Daoist traditions, as well. It should be noted that there has been much abuse of these practices for personal sexual gratification.

## RACISM IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

Buddhism has a long history of displacement and decline in the sub-continent. The decline of Buddhism has been attributed to various factors, such as invasions of north India by Indo-Iranian Huns, Hepthalites, Turkic-Mongolians, Arabs, and Persians that included destruction of Buddhist institutions and religious persecutions. Competition with Hinduism and later Islam were also important factors. By the 12th century, Buddhism was extinguished in India (Wiki, “Decline of Buddhism in India”). Today, it flourishes, although there are still sticky issues.

Attia Sattar, a Pakistani immigrant to the U.S. says, “Nowhere does race blindness feel more hurtful than in well-intentioned white *sanghas* presently striving for diversity and inclusion...For instance, when I am told my presence is gladdening in a predominantly white sangha, I feel a weight placed on my shoulders. My being in the room cannot and does not simply signify my desire to learn and hold space together. Instead, I am perceived as a representative and ambassador for people of color, with my words serving as lessons on how people of color think and feel.” <https://tricycle.org/magazine/racism-in-buddhism/>

Anthony "Amp" Elmore challenges what he calls racist Japanese Buddhists in Japan: "While a Black man can become the most powerful and well known man on planet earth no Black man has ever achieved a respected position in Buddhist Religious Ranks in the SGI or Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist organizations. Although Black people have been members of the religious sects for over 50 years there is not one recognized Black Buddhist scholar or Nichiren Shoshu leader to emerge from these organizations." [https://proudblackbuddhist.org/Japanese\\_Are\\_Racist\\_\\_A\\_Lecture/index.html](https://proudblackbuddhist.org/Japanese_Are_Racist__A_Lecture/index.html)

Closer to home, Attia Sattar, a Pakistani immigrant to the U.S. says, "Nowhere does race blindness feel more hurtful than in well-intentioned white sanghas presently striving for diversity and inclusion...For instance, when I am told my presence is gladdening in a predominantly white sangha, I feel a weight placed on my shoulders. My being in the room cannot and does not simply signify my desire to learn and hold space together. Instead, I am perceived as a representative and ambassador for people of color, with my words serving as lessons on how people of color think and feel." <https://tricycle.org/magazine/racism-in-buddhism/>

In all these instances, there are contexts that can too easily be overlooked. The tenants of Buddhism do not condone racist or discriminatory behavior. The teachings are one thing, and the human beings in samsara are another. The persecutions of Buddhists in India have left bitter resentments. It is an adage that people in the East have long memories. In America, regardless the highfalutin words of our Constitution, it is the American way to shoot children and persecute people of color.

. . .

Hi, Sekeu

The term "evil" is a misunderstanding of the nature of a human being. There is no concept of "evil" in Buddhism, at least not in the Christian sense of the word, like evil beings tempting you to commit sins. Actually, humans are already Buddhas; they just haven't realized it. Gautama Buddha pointed out that there is suffering caused by ignorance and desire, and he showed the path to discover your pure Buddha nature, here and now on earth in this lifetime. No one is born evil, just confused.

Hi Sophia

I read that article you mention about the Pakistani girl feeling awkward in a white sangha. I can empathize, as a white Buddhist hanging out with Tibetans. But, as my lama told me, "Get over it."

It seems everyone in this class has drunk the racist/sexist cool aid. The Western Enlightenment does not have the corner on the market for being racist and sexist, Institutions in general, since the beginning of history, have pitted one class, race, and sex against the other to maintain control. Divide and conquer is the motto. We do it in the home, at work, and at play. No one likes

it, but we do it for self-aggrandizement. How to break the chain? Cut through the self-clinging ego. Relax. Let ignorance self-liberate itself to reveal the Clear Light of Equanimity.

Quack quack quack.

Hi, Allyssa

There still seem to be a misunderstanding of the realizations of the Age of Enlightenment. "White privilege" is not at the root of the Enlightenment concepts. The philosophers were male, white, and privileged, and this condition did, indeed, prevent them from seeing the full meaning of their radical concepts; but "Inalienable Rights" are rights that belong to all, and the truth of this will come to be, regardless of the personal biases of the individuals who uttered the words.

bell hooks is right: "Progressive whites who have no difficulty challenging institutionalized racism may have no clue about challenging the day-to-day xenophobia and racism inside everyone." One can sit on the cushion and meditate for ten thousand years and never see their Buddha nature.

OM

• • •

Buddhists view prejudice as a form of ignorance. The Buddha was born into the Hindu caste system, and Gautama Buddha pointed out that the caste system is an example of discrimination that prevents people from attaining enlightenment. Buddhists view prejudice as ignorance and that our believing that we are in some way superior to those around us derives from fear. This, in turn, causes us to suffer. Buddhists also teach equanimity, having an equal attitude towards everyone, believing there is not any essential difference between individuals, that all sentient beings are valued and should be treated fairly. Everyone has inherent "Buddha Mind" and with this comes the ability to become enlightened, regardless of our race or culture. When enlightened, we all share one cosmic groove.

AH LA LA HO

အဲလာ

## AFTERWORD

How easy it is to critique the foundational thinking of the Age of Enlightenment and place blame on the philosophers of an earlier era for their short-sightedness in seeing the

outcome of those ideas centuries later and, then, to reach for another bubbly cool-aid from an exotic culture and think that those ideas might be the panacea without the slightest idea how much intellectual and physical work is necessary to reverse the ingrained cultural habits of the past few centuries to reach the root of our problems.

Western Enlightenment entails a reasoned understanding of the complexity of the precarious political and environmental mess we are in, while Eastern Enlightenment means to understand that self-knowing awareness is without cause or condition and is not attained by attempting to purify the meditations of others through reactionary argument but by first developing peace within one's own mindstream. One can be passionately engaged in public debate and action, but it will be ineffectual and counterproductive if the source derives from an angry disposition.

Relax, relax, relax.

