

2014-10-06 Earth Care Week And Buddhism

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SPEAKERS

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Good evening, and I think it's a little bit cloudy. Let's see, we're getting a little bit better a little bit. How's that sound out there for you guys. Good out to you out there. Okay. So we have this new mic killed learning a little bit about so.

So about a year and a half ago, there was a meeting that happens every three years of the insight meditation teachers in our particular tradition. And about I don't know how many came at 200 came to spirit rock, to spend some days together and talk about what we have in common teaching communities, the various things that were involved in and in the middle of that meeting, There was a we received we sit in this big romantic circle, and middle of the circle was placed to scroll. And that scroll was unrolled. And it was really long and had something like 1500 to 2000 names on it. And it was a kind of a petition or letter of request to these Buddhist teachers to get engaged in environmental issues of our time to revive actually said find some leadership in this area. And so some of those teachers kind of banded together and had been working on climate change initiatives and things since then. But one of the outcomes of that meeting was the idea that as a collective of teachers and communities inside communities around the globe, we would take the first week of October, and celebrate earthcare week and with the idea that if we work together The collective action is more meaningful than if we just work as individually. And so this last year, and this year, the first week of October has been dedicated to this. And this year, the beginning of the week is yesterday, October 5. And one of the nice things that's happening is that something like 15, prominent teachers in our tradition, are putting on an online I guess, conference or something on the environment started yesterday, and, and you can go listen to their talks on environmental issues in Buddhism. And that can be found at a website called one Earth Sangha. So it's kind of nice and Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach, and all kinds of people are addressing this issue. So I wanted to do devote today in honor of Earth care week, to talk a little bit about Buddhism and the environment. I think it's happens frequent enough that people will come to, to me as a Buddhist teacher or to other Buddhist teachers, and expect Buddhist teachers to have awkward responses to all kinds of things. I mean, you'd be surprised, under what people think I have expertise. And once you're in this role, you're considered a jack of all trades. So a lot of things and, and maybe because Buddhism is a religion, there's an expectation that religion is involved in issues of ultimate concern, issues of existential issues of who we are in this universe. What's the meaning of life? How do we how do we live our life? How do we respond to the kind of global kinds of issues as opposed to Buddhism being just a meditation technology for individuals to sit and meditate and, you know, do their own thing And so people come and say, Well, what does Buddhism have to say about the environment? And in our, and how do we respond to the environment. And so one of the one of the interesting phenomena in the modern era, is people have tried to put together a Buddhist environmental ethic, which never really existed in Buddhism, and probably in other religions as well. Because 2500 years ago, this level of environmental concerns that we have today, we're not so present. And so

people have gone back to the early teachings in teaching of Buddhism and, and picked out things, little things here and there, that address or can be applied to environmental issues to come up with a global kind of environmental ethic for Buddhism. And I think it's an important thing. It's a wonderful thing. It's a creative thing. A lot of creative minds are going into kind of trying to understand Buddhist principles and how reply to this kind of thing. And so we're all part of this kind of coming up with kind of a new form of Buddhism, at least aspect of Buddhism Buddhist teachings. So in having this earth care week, one of the wonderful words is the word care. And I like the word care.

The it to me in my mind, it's another way of saying compassion. But it means compassion with action. You can care but somehow, in my mind, at least my vocabulary that caring is one step. Compassion means you have empathy and sympathy and concern. And but care has a double meaning that you care about something but you actually have cared about it. You actually done something your, your care for someone who's sick. And so it's a beautiful thing to be compassionate, beautiful thing to care. The, as I often like to point out, they say that pure compassion or clean compassion, compassion that doesn't come with distress, produces oxytocin. And oxytocin is this wonderful chemical that makes us feel good. In the end, maybe this is why the Dalai Lama says over and over again, that if you want to be happy care for others, if you want to be happy, be concerned with the welfare of others. And I can remember very well still to this day, the time that I was caring for someone who was ongoing, it went on through the day, and it was intermittent. And I found that every time I took care of her I felt so good. I just like felt warm and tingly and helped her cut a hole and connected and wow, this is interesting. And then we park a little bit and then we come together and that would care for her again. Whoo. This feels good. and compassion can be you know, can be a wonderful thing if you're very nurturing and meaningful versus compassionate. And it's a beautiful, beautiful thing that your compassion and care supposedly has done well supports and nourishes help someone else serve someone else. And isn't it nice that it can serve both people? So the environment we have this, you know, and we only have one planet. And this planet has done an amazing job in, you know, managing to, to first evolve us and then manage to support us for a long time. Humans have been around for a while. I don't know exactly how many hundred thousands of years but been around for a while. And, but there's more and more of us. And it's the more and more of us it's become an issue. I read recently that human beings in the last 40 years have been used more natural resources than the previous 4000 years of human history. Isn't that something? What a ratio by really we were lucky we lucked out. We are the ones who have gotten, you know, the bank vaults open and we got to go in and grab everything. And aren't we lucky to be so rich? Maybe. But that's quite something that you know, compared to all of human history, how much we consume, and that's huge consumption is going to go up and up and up, has big impacts on the world. And I don't know if you know this, but we have this wonderful San Francisco Bay and especially the south end of the bay here. The water water is fairly shallow and, and naturalistic colleges, wherever the people think care of the bay. They've made a decision that they don't want to stir the mud. They won't do anything that upsets everyone dig it up in any kind of way down here, because underneath There's not too far down underneath the layers of the mud. There's a huge layer of arsenic. And then our snake is there because our snake or sign has been RCR snake. When they the part of the treasure bolt that opened up for us here in California was all this minerals in gold and silver up in the Sierras and also down a little bit down south and near San Jose. And one of the ways that they did a fantastic job moving mountains, they just kind of like destroy 130 years ago, 40 years later is destroying mountains up in this year as they had water guns and they you know, they pump water and they tore up mountains and they use this I guess arsenic to kind of separate out the gold from the soil from the mud or whatever it was. And all this delusion of water with all this arsenic had to go somewhere. And so it ended up in the San Francisco Bay. And it settled in the bottom of the of the bay. And yes, please, you know it better. Oh, it's mercury. America, Quicksilver. Oh, yeah. Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. So I shouldn't be talking about this.

So Mercury, and so now it's laying there and they don't want to stir up the day because it's better. Right now. It's safe under the layers of mud. Wow, that's something. So that's been repeated over and over again, many places in the world where human creativity has managed to open up the treasure vaults of this earth and have created a lot of damage in the process of you. Seeing all this stuff up and put put a tremendous amount of, you know, poisonous metals into the ground. All kinds of things go in all kinds of places. So here's an interesting thing. That I don't know how maybe this gentleman knows more than I do. I'd love to be told or, but there's a, what they've been learning in the loosen times. I don't know how prevalent it is, but there's a wonderful technique for cleaning up soils, where that had been polluted with toxins of various kinds. And this is called Fido. Fido, remediation, and Phyto remediation. Phyto means plant is using plants to somehow heal that. There's those poison polluted soils, and there's different plants that have different three different things. And there's some plants that will actually absorb the point in the soil, and the toxins, and then you can harvest the plant and then do something more responsible or careful with all the toxins the plant is taken up. Sunflower is apparently very good for arsenic. So you It takes a while to do with many times in harvest and all that. But that can clean it out rather than digging up the soil and you're doing some mechanical chemical process to clean it up. And then there's a process called Phyto transformation. That's when I love the transformation by plants. So organic poisons like you know, pesticides like that. They end up you know, in concentrated forms in the soil oils and different organic things. And there are certain plants that if you grow those plants, they'll absorb, absorb those organic compounds and transform them into something that's safe, they'll digest them or something like that. Isn't that great? So in our that wonder, you know, in their wonderful natural world there are sometimes built into the natural system, solutions to the plant growth provides. And what a gift. What an amazing thing. And so someone found these plants find found these different things, and they all have you some of them had these amazing uses if we know. I don't know what the number is, but you do know how many plants are on the verge of being extinct. What if one of the ones are just about to go extinct, it does go extinct today. Tomorrow, they look back in some way near that plant. That's the plant. They can take the small guy out of there, that's the plant that can do something. But you know, we let it merrily go and disappear. We don't know how much we need the natural world work. Our life is completely intertwined and built into it. This beautiful mutuality and maybe We need all of it to really kind of live a harmonious and uncooperative life.

Here's a quote by a great Thai Buddhist teacher named Buddhadasa. He wrote, the entire cosmos is a cooperative, the sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and the earth are about our bodily parts function as a cooperative, when we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering and death, then we can build a noble, even a heavenly environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we'll all perish. So it's a cooperative, so we better cooperate. And maybe we need everything in order to make it all work. To care for this world is a way of caring for ourselves. So in terms of Looking at Buddhism for some environment clues for the minute by mental ethic, there is a great deal of what's called a fable called Jataka Tale that similar to other cultures have similar ones like this have poor farmers or destitute farmers who was just barely getting by.

As low as somehow or other they ended up with a golden Swan that all the feathers were golden and they found that they plucked one feather they tell us you know it was worth a lot they can go sell the feather and have money food money to last for a while. And so then one of the farmers whenever Ross was away one day, got kind of greeting because you know, one feathers could put the whole Swan full of feathers even better. So that person plucked all the flowers out of the this one, no flowers or other feathers. And when they came back and found the swan was still alive, but had no effect. They wonder

what's gonna happen now. What happened was that ordinary feathers grew back. And that was it for the golden feathers. So who knows when you when we harvest too much take too much out of this natural world. Then at some point, the ARP, beautiful swan globe, whatever is not going to keep producing enough in order to take care of us. I grew up in Atlanta growing up was in the Mediterranean coast. And it's been kind of spent a fair amount of time and some of these islands in the coast of Africa, back then Yugoslavia and beautiful, beautiful islands. However, part of the weather beautiful weather beautiful poor, there's darkness. So just being all these rocks and denuded rocks and just like you know, half done is beautiful, right? Maybe, and 2000 years ago, the Romans want a tree And whatever else that that vironment said, and the trees, and then some of these islands were denuded, and that soil and washed away and once the soil washed away, nothing could grow back because this would be the soil. And so there was, that's an example of taking all the feathers off the golden Swan, and then the golden Swan can't produce anymore. So we're coming to this now, in many ways in our globe, it's happened over and over again for not just in the modern world, but back that was 2000 years ago with the Romans many places in the world where humans have over overused over, extracted over whatever, and destroyed the environment. So it couldn't support life anymore. It now may be happening more in a global level. And there's, you know, already we're seeing lots and lots of suffering in the world. One of the very sad things about environmental suffering is that it's the people Who the people who consume the least, who are who experienced the consequences of those who consumed the most, that it's the wealthy who has the most the highest levels of consumption. And sometimes it's the people who support that consumption in a variety of ways with mining and for harvesting and forest, you know, the looting of forests and stuff. It happens where the indigenous people live with people who are in third world countries, and they suffer in a terrible ways that people in California don't see the consequences of what their consumption are. So are we supposed to get distressed by this? Are we supposed to now feel guilty and terrible by it? That's one option. But that's not the compassionate option. Compassion has nothing to do with distress. Caring is supposed to be something that is a nourishing and meaningful for everyone. compassionate compassion only makes sense only If there is suffering, so there is a kind of bittersweet thing about compassion. But part of what compassion is, is, is a, hopefully a kind of welcomed or welcoming response to the conditions of the world where something more than the world gets healed or someone else gets healed, but we get healed. From a Buddhist point of view, the ecological crisis is a psychological crisis. In Buddhist environmental ethic, pulls up on ancient Buddhist teachings, that no, I think back 2500 years ago, maybe it was more mythic than it was, then it would be valid today, that the state of the earth the state of our natural world, health of it is indirectly in relationship to the ethics the ethical behavior and an activity minds of human beings. As people get more greedy, the world gets worse as people get more hostile. the natural world decreases as people live more diluted, the natural world health, the natural world decreases. And it's kind of what we see all around the world right now.

You know it places of war, place of hostility, tremendous amount of environmental damage is occurring. How many oil fields in Iraq have been destroyed in the last 25 years? It seems to happen regularly now in Syria, that, and then bombing oil fields, the explosion of them, the burning of them, and the people who live nearby are suffering from the toxic effects of some of these oil fields that have been bombed and burned and all that result of hostility. greed. You know, the, the, the mercury in the San Francisco Bay is a result of greed of people who wanted to just wanted silver or gold at all expenses. delusion of understanding all this. So for Buddhism, it's a psychological crisis as much as an ecological one. So back to plants, how to begin beautiful plants that can be an example for us. There's a, some plants have a kind of a membrane between I don't know exactly where it is, but between the flower and the stem or between the fruit and the stem somewhere in there, where the plant will take in, sometimes toxins from the soil, but the toxins won't pass through that membrane. So the fruit that grows in that plant, won't absorb won't have those will be free of those things. Lead is one example, lead when I pass

through some of these membranes, so even though there's a lot of lead in the soil, you don't eat the leaves of some plants because it'll lead the fruit can be free of the land so this membrane it protects the thing. So one of the important that using that as a metaphor, I think one of the very important tasks in responding to environmental crisis is that we need to be not Phyto transformers, but is what we call the homosapien Transformers that there's so much toxin in the world of psychology and the world of human beings in terms of greed and hate and fear and all kinds of things. That one of the things that we I think we need to do is learning that ability to take this in taking the world having affect us and transform it so that the fruit of who we are that our fruit is not been is not poisoned by what goes around us. And so this is one of the reasons why Buddhist practice is so important because it's this, you know, homosapien in transforming machine, that we don't succumb to the greed, we don't succumb to the fear. We don't succumb to the distress we don't succumb to the hostility that is so contagious and so rampant in this world. But somehow we're able to be mindful of it, be present for it, and transform it. So that our the fruit of us how we act and behave in the world and live in the world, expresses something that's free of those toxins. So for free of greed, then we can express generosity for free of hate, we can express love, if it's free of delusion, we can have wisdom, if we have free of fear, I don't know where but then we'd have courage and, and freedom and that kind of work goes hand in hand with a work of compassion, because, as I said, the beautiful aspects of compassion, where it's nourishing cannot be nourished if the compassion is mixed up with some of these, if you allow me to use the word toxins of greed, hate and delusion. And so back to the word care Earth care week, I think caring is a beautiful thing. And I like it that this is called Earth care week, that somehow at least for 111 week, a year, you know, we give a little more focus to the this than the nourishment, of care, the healing of care, the inspiration of care that the goodness of care that we're all capable of, and, and this transformative process. We live in a world of greed, hate and delusion, and we experience our own distress and fear and numbness and denial and you know, and overwhelmed with it all, but to transform it, so it comes out have us in the fruit of caring and caring for others and for the world. This is, I think, one of the great tasks that I hope that people who do Buddhist practice are willing to do.

And caring doesn't have to mean you know, managing to make big changes in the world, but a lot of small changes. You know, I don't know if they're gonna be good enough, but they make a difference. And so what can you do that would express care for this natural world, the world that we live in? What are some of the small things were the large things that you can do? Yesterday I gave a talk something like this. Yes, every Sunday morning, and I asked how many people had walked to IMC how many people had carpooled how many people taking the train bus and the one person to take public transportation yesterday They were most people walked. But we weren't mean, it was to me. They were like, maybe seven. And everyone else had driven that there was one set of four that had carpooled. Can we do more of that? Can we do more of that, to care for the natural world, by how we drive is not just caring for the natural world, for those of us living in the Bay Area. If we can create less smog in the Bay Area, we're also caring for children in the Central Valley. There's a very higher incidence of asthma in the Central Valley. Because we're so lucky that all this smoke a smog we make that gets us gets blown usually gets blown away into the, into the Central Valley and they have to live with our smog. So it's caring for the children in the Central Valley to drive less if you can. It's caring for all kinds of things, too. produce less smog. One of the Yeah, so to care. And when do we start? When do we start? And when did when did When do we start in such a way becomes a movement and takes a big change. I remember when I think was San Francisco was the first city was to ban plastic bags. And I'd write the first one in California at least. And what San Jose was first, really, that's nice. And I think that some of the people I talked to were kind of like surprised and I thought was Sam Cisco and the hippies in San Francisco. And the people kind of so many people were kind of dismissive of San Francisco doing it. And now it's state law. You know, it's grown from there. Or when I was growing up in Los Angeles in the late 60s, they had an election, where they asked people to vote, whether they'd be Willing to separate out the trash between the trash and the recycling and overwhelmingly people in LA at that time voted

no it's a it's a drag it's a burden you know, it's a troublesome thing to do to separate out you know, it's a all this extra work. And now you don't know we don't find the hope so we don't think about it's obvious as we do. In fact, now the they don't let us vote on it, they just they just bring us the bins and say you have to do it this way. Things change and small changes, build up momentum. And hopefully they change with someone and change with you. And how they change can be your fruit, the fruit, how you have the homosapien Transformers that we are, how we take the toxins, the psycho toxins that exists in our world, and let them come through us in such a way that we then the fruit of it purified fruit, the fruit that's isn't happiness, toxins is our care for others and for the world around us, I think is a great thing. I think it's hopeless, I believe is kind of hopeless to think about making a difference for the environment and make a big change unless we enjoy the process. Unless we feel appeal and nourishing and meaningful and so that we want to do it not out of a sense of duty, and sense of obligation and like all of more, one more thing to do, but rather we find that it hit our life gets benefited as a result. So this is maybe a small, silly example. But as often as I can, I walk to IMC, for bike tie MC and I like to do it because I don't want to drive a car that's makes more smog in the area.

So that's kind of one of the main reasons I do it. But I love walking It's one of the highlights of my day, when I walk here I like walking down here and looking at the trees in the sky getting the exercise and feeling the air whatever and I come down here I feel more alive and energized a very nice way and then I do if I drove down here and so, you know, I would do it even if I could, even if you know, the disco suddenly discovered that smog is actually good. So, it exists so how can we demonstrate to the world are they are caring for all this. Not that we do it? Because we need to we have to, but we do it because in a way that we benefit from it that our life is enhanced and improved by it. What does it take to fit our life It has been improved. One of the things that takes is to learn how maybe consuming Learn how to consume less how to use less, in a way that enhances our life. What do we want to do with? With, you know, with the resources we have with the time we have with the money we have they we didn't spend consuming things maybe that we don't need. So Oh, I'm so glad I didn't buy that. I'm so glad because I was able to donate money to this great cause, or I was so glad I didn't buy that thing because I would have had to spend an hour or two driving around checking out the prices and you know, and they just I could actually what I did instead was I stayed in a garden in my garden or I hung out with a neighbor and we hadn't talked for a few months. It was great to just hang out, and that felt really good. So I don't have my examples here. So good, but but I think the principle I'm trying to get across is that is that I would hope that this as homosapien transformation machine that we can be, can take what's going on. It's a great challenge that exists in our world, many of the challenges we have, and somehow has a understanding of it as knowledge is of it as this psychological crisis of it all, as we become aware of it, that we respond to it all, by some ways, taking it and taking it in transforming in such a way that the fruit is protected by the membrane of our practice. And the fruit that we can offer back in their world is a care, caring for the world caring for others in a way that is inspiring. That's rejuvenating, that's makes us happy, makes us feel content makes us feel Of course I do this, this is not a burden to do this. This is you know, I feel better because of this as a diamond on my said, if you want to be happy care for others care for the world. So that's my attempt and environmental ethic for you. And so we have this week until Sunday to be Earth care week. So I think you'd be quite inspiring. If this, especially to me, but as by hopefully all of us, if all of us this week could give some thought to what I've said today, and consider how you can do something that would be an expression of caring for this world caring for the earth and to do it in a way that nourishes you. Not so it's kind of a you know, drag a sacrifice, but you do it you look you try to you consider and think about how can I do this in a way that I'm a better person for a marathon. You know, I'm happier because of doing it. And then maybe then you might want to do it again. And then there's hope for us. I think and then then hopefully it's contagious. Your neighbors will see how happy you are. So we have five minutes. And this is a huge topic and so important for our

society as a whole because globe as a whole. I didn't leave you enough time to say a lot, but does anybody want to comment about that or have any questions about what I said? Please?

This isn't Yeah. So one thing I started doing years ago is I started hanging up the laundry and not using the dryer. And it started out as this thing of all I have to do this because you know, the dryer uses so much electricity, blah, blah, blah. And it has become the highlight of my day, because I'm outside with the birds and I'm looking at everything And it's just such a lovely experience that I make time for pretty much every day to hang the laundry up on the line. And it has just given me so much joy.

Yeah, the times I've done that. I delight because my clothes smell fresher. Like a luxury.

Wow.

Yes. Is there light on?

I just didn't push it enough.

So I'm trying to understand something Buddhist compassion is the same now as it was 100 years ago, but 100 years ago, maybe a Buddhist would not have been so conscious of the environment may have had different choices about a lot of things.

moral issues, and all that

What's going on there?

I don't think I understand. So I would say that in the past, there was a Buddhist ethic morality, how to live compassionately, and caring for this world. And it was applied to the issues of their time. So that's true. And the scale of environmental issues that Buddhists had to face in Asia, maybe we're not as great as what we have today. If you go back and Christianity more than 100 years ago, how much of environmental ethics we find in Christianity probably don't find that much. You know, it's just like not any more or less, they probably hide in other religions. So maybe maybe I don't understand the question.

I think maybe I don't understand, either. I don't I don't understand

where my confusion comes from.

Here. So yes, so but I don't know either, but I will give Give you an answer anyway. You see an early Buddhism, a care for the natural world that you're in one of the place you see it is in the only people that the Buddha felt that he could really give strong guidance to how you supposed to live his life, their lives, were his monastic followers, because they had really committed to that kind of life. And he didn't he was, my impression was that the Buddha was more circumspect about telling late people what they should be doing. But the people who could tell what to do, he gave him a very strong teachings on non violence. You don't kill animals, and you don't destroy plant life. And you don't dig in the ground because you might destroy the worms to animals and then they're so very strong care of not causing harm to the natural world was very important back then. And so that was expressed there. And then being very careful with natural resources seems to be built into also that monastic life. And so there's a story of, of, of someone comes to I think as a non Buddhist disciple, I guess maybe a story something like someone gave him a new set of robes, but he had a set of robes already. So someone said what

are you doing with new set of robes when you have a set of robes? You should keep it you know not not having more use more resources and he said well, what happens when I get a new set of robes and my old robes I you know, still have I turn them into a bedspread. And but what do you do when the bedspread gets old but then I make it into a mattress cover. And what happens in the mattress cover gets old when I turn it into a into a towel. And what happens when the towel gets old then it turned into a rug, you know floor floor covering and what do you do in the forest cover and gets all old. So it will then I cut it up into pieces and I pack it into the mud that we use to build the walls of the huts. So this you know, so rather than throwing anything away, you keep reusing it and being careful and with the resources. So those are the kind of stories that people try to find environmental ethic and Buddhism what I find, you know, the justification or inspiration from the early tradition. We'll call on those stories with us examples. That Yes, it's there as well. Set. You know, it's good enough for an answer.

Great, thank you.

Okay, so earthcare week, think about this week, please.