

# 2020-10-04 Earth Care as Self Care

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So the first Sunday of every year is this part of the kind of around the first week of October is called Earth care week. And it's a Buddhist kind of day, that period to care for the earth and focus on the earth. It kind of like Earth or Earth Day in April, but this is a week for Buddhists, and so today's that day to give a talk on that topic.

And what I'd like to start off by saying is that caring for the earth and caring for oneself, many times are the same thing. They overlap. Sometimes we can care for one or the other. But they overlap. And over time, over the last decades, that overlap is becomes stronger and stronger, bigger and bigger. And where the circumstance the earth, the ecology of the earth, and how things are how the earth is kind of ecology is unfolding and being destroyed and being shifted is has a huge impact on human well being. And without caring for the earth. Some of the major disruptions in human life will occur. So the caring for the earth that is caring for oneself caring for us, humans, and many ways caring for ourselves and learning how to care for ourselves deeply, especially with the what opens up through Buddhist meditation is also a way that we can care for the world. And this idea that what that we get changed through Buddhist practice, so that our values or orientation, and what motivates us begins to change is one of the key features of this, you know, this path that we're on. And one of those features, kind of part of the culture of awakening is that certainly as caring, anukampa, caring for the earth, caring for others, caring for ourselves, but the radical kind of shift that is possible, I think, with with, you know, this, how we get changed through practice, is that instead of caring for the world, caring for the earth, being motivated by obligation, being motivated by a strong kind of adherence to responsibilities, or to rights, human rights, human rights are extremely important. But justifying caring for the world, because people have rights is certainly a worthy thing to do.

But what comes out of awakening is a different orientation, different basis for doing the same actions, but coming from a different place. And it comes from generosity, it comes from goodwill, and comes

from general from care. And, that's a motivating force. And so there's not a should, there's not an obligation, there's not guilt, there's not anger and blame, and it's not being motivated by fear. All those kinds of things get settled in this practice, to remarkable degree, and boost, but it gives us access to other sources of action, other sources of motivation. And that, for Buddhists can supersede or be take priority, over arguments of that we should do things based on human rights or based on human responsibility. So we have, but this only works is only only works, if we act from and really act maybe passionately from our goodwill, our care and our generosity. If we simply talk about it and say this is you know, that's it, don't do anything, then I think we have to fall back on things like responsibilities and human rights and in order to really and really take those seriously in order to really care for the suffering planet we live in. But the so we live now in this changing world, of course that now here in California, we're facing multiple challenges and other places in the world are facing multiple channel challenges.

In addition to the Coronavirus here in California, we're facing lots of fires and week after week of really smoky air that that, you know, some people are at a health hazard now, but for everyone who's smoke living this, they say that the accumulation of this kind of ongoing smoke will affect not necessarily our well being in the short term, but might shorten our lifetime. Because of the stress and the challenges it adds to the system.

And then we have heat waves after heat waves, sometimes you have all this heat, then we have drought that's happening, that not enough rain. And then we have another place in the United States, we have hurricanes and tropical storms are coming in and flooding. And so the environmental challenges are huge that we go go in, and we have we're living under. And some of them clearly have to do not with the interface between how humans live and the growing population and growing in places where great growing use of, of resources and natural resources that that interface with the human world and the non human world has reached its limit to how much it can sustain how much of the world can sustain human growth, human consumption, without coming to the homeostasis began shifting and changing in some big way. And here in California, it's most clear with all the fires, that some of the challenges with the fires is that we've pushed into fire zones with those towns and homes and everything that then has to be defended from fires. fires have been part of this environment for centuries. But the last century, there's been a lot of fire suppression. And so of course, then there's a lot more dry wood, and then shrubs in particular ready to burn.

A couple of years ago, two, three years ago, I met a Native American elder who lives in the mountains not far from here. And he remembers that when he was a child, he would go with his father and grandfather, every year, they'd go into the into deeper into the mountains. And one of the things they would do is they would do small fires a regular thing they do fires and he said, one to 10 acre fires in the fall. And that was part of their care and tending for the places where they lived in the mountains. And then in the 1960s, the Forest Service came and told his father, they had to stop. And because now they weren't gonna allow any fires. And so, but now 50 years later or more, the Forest Service is

coming to him, who only has a child's memory, to learn from him. What did they know about making those kinds of prescribed burns, those kinds of fires, they did it a time of year that was usually not considered safe. They seem to them safely. And so how do they know to do it? How do you know what what could they? What could we learn today, from the ancient lore that been learned over many, many generations by the Native Americans? I read recently about a man who same thing where his father was also a Native American this year as and his father stopped doing similar burns up there, when he got a ticket from a fine from the Forest Service for burning illegally, even though his people have been doing it for generations generations. And, and so how do we care? How do we tend? How do we cooperate with the natural world? So we live in some kind of harmony with it, rather than because we can't just keep pushing and pushing into the limits, without something breaking and something coming back and changing? And so caring for the world becomes caring for ourselves? And how do we do that? Not from duty, not from guilt, not from obligation, all of which, if nothing else works is necessary. But if why do we do it from generosity and create real genuine sense of care and goodwill? And enter energetically? So what do we do? How do we do this? So I have thinking about this I thought about a story from the video from the books about the code of conduct for the monastics they have a lot of stories there. And they have stories that are tribute to the Buddha's lives and some of them seem more fable like, but who knows maybe they're true. And here's one where the Buddha encounters the natural world and natural world that could be seen as dangerous and, and his response and how we responded to that. Just like we're facing this Coronavirus, we're facing fires, we're facing smoke all these things. How do we fix that? How do we show up for it?

So the story has to do with the Buddha's relative, a cousin or a nephew, named Devadatta. And Devadatta was a monk ordained by the Buddha. But he wanted to take over the order of monks, he wanted to be the leader. So he was jealous or had a quest for power or something. And so, at one point, he tried to few points three times he tried to kill the Buddha. And the third time, the first time he tried to get some assassins to kill the Buddha, but when they came to the Buddha, somehow, the presence of the Buddha just changed their minds. And they, rather than killing him, sat down and learn from him. The second time Devadatta rolled or rock down from a mountain cliff down on top of the Buddha, and he missed the Buddha but the rock shattered, and then a sliver of the rock punctured the Buddha's foot and he bled and he was injured a little bit. A third time Devadatta went to the Royal stables. Any he went to the to the people who were caring for the Royal elephants. And elephants back then were kind of like Bradley tanks for the modern world, they were animals of war, that were quite impressive. And they were trained to fight and train to kill apparently. So he went to his royal elephant stables, and he told the people who worked there, that he was a relative of the king and he'd come to ask them for help. And he would give them lots of rewards if he helped them. And that would be that they would take the elephant out one morning, and place it at the head of some street, that the Buddha was expected to walk down. And then when the Buddha was started to walk down the street, the element was to charge the Buddha and to kill him. So the Buddha got up in the morning and went out for alms into town. And when he came to this street, and sure enough, the elephant was let loose, it came charging down the street for the Buddha. Apparently, it was a long way away, because a three

times people who were nearby, told the Buddha to leave, to leave to run away. Each time the Buddha says no, he said, Buddhas don't run away from danger. Something like that. And so they would have just stood there and stood there calmly and peacefully and stood there facing the Buddha, facing the elephant. And as the elephant was coming towards him, the Buddha filled his heart with goodwill with loving kindness for the elephant. And as the elephant came closer, it slowed down. And then it got close enough, it actually got down on its knees bent down and laid there on the ground in front of the Buddha, and then ended his charge and didn't kill the Buddha.

And so that was the end of the story. The Buddha then was not harmed. So it's kind of a fable, but it's fable, which I think lends itself to interpretation. And the interpretation is that in the face of nature, the dangers of nature, which there certainly are, that, one of the things to do, is to look at it to really stop and take a good, honest look, to study it, understand what's really going on. And whether it's understanding climate change or understanding something locally that what's happening with your local creeks. Are there any creeks, rivers and waterways near your home, and you really know what's happening to them.

I was very surprised after now, they've been in Redwood City, almost 20 years. The other day, I went for a walk and I discovered a creek I'd never seen before. And it's right next to the high school and it's sandwiched between it's only maybe 10 feet, area, fences on either side protecting it, and their reads into the bushes and little trees growing in this little waterway. And I was just fascinated that this exists in Redwood City, I thought most of the creeks were covered over by asphalt. And so now I go by there and I'm studying it. So do we face and study the dangerous study what's happening, face it and see it look at it.

And this ability, you know, it's basic, basic practice of mindfulness, we stop and we look we stop and we learn. We pay attention to things. It's a little different when it's something about what's happening in the environment, environment the world because it's more than just offering kind of a silent attention and noting practice to what's happening. It's also involves studying and learning more about it. And then the Buddha offered his goodwill And his maybe his generosity and his care for the elephant. So. So, to come from goodwill, this is one of the most important teachings of the most important, but one of the most very important teachings of the Buddha but how to live in the world is to live in the world with goodwill, he put this at such a high, a high level of importance. And using again way religious teachings use hyperbole. He said, even if bandits capture you, and are sorry, if our graphic This is and are cutting off your arms, do not give into ill will maintain a heart of goodwill. And now, he didn't say don't try to escape. In other situations, he says it's fine, it's appropriate to risk to escape danger like that, too. So someone's going to harm you. But I think this kind of thought experiment is when this is hopeless to be escaped. And even in this kind of extreme situation, maintain goodwill for the bandits. I don't know if you want to kind of take this literally, exactly. And but it what it points to is the tremendous value this tradition puts on having a heart that doesn't succumb to hostility, doesn't get caught in the grip of fear, doesn't get caught up in greed and desires, because some consumption, but a heart that

is able to stay close to that place, I would like to say natural place, tender place, maybe tender place where these beautiful qualities of heart can be here compassion and kindness, friendliness, goodwill, and care generosity. That this is our inner wealth. These are this is also part of the natural world, how we are in our hearts. And if we want to do self care, we want to be careful that we don't lose, destroy, cover over the richest the richest parts of our natural inner life. And ironically, or maybe not sorry, ironically, the very forces of the mind, that destroy the inner life recovered over and make it inaccessible. Greed, hatred and delusion are the very same forces that humans are living with, that are hugely responsible for so much of the environmental damage that's going on for the world. And in this way, this caring for ourselves and caring for the world, at heart has, has a common denominator. And the common denominator is to clarify and purify ourselves, of forces of greed, hate and delusion. And in doing so, also, overcoming unwholesome fear, unhelpful fear that humans are often often drive human life and drive us to often to make terrible decisions and politically, economically and, and socially. And so to begin to care, to look and to appreciate the tremendous overlap between the world the earth and the environment, and our human life. And, and to take an honest look at this, including an honest look at ourselves. As some five years ago, when I had that statistics, there was this idea that 7% of the human population are responsible for 50% of the carbon dioxide emissions, reverse that and they say 50% of the human beings on the planet, three and a half billion are, are the poorest people are responsible for only 7% of the carbon dioxide emission. That's really lopsided, but we can't just simply increase everything for the poor. So, they are carbon dioxide, consumption goes up, production goes up, as much as it is for the developed world. But we also want to, there has to be some change in what the developed world does a radical change, radical change in consumption and life, lifestyle, all kinds of things.

And then, so then I use language that needs to be which now becomes a language of obligation. But from this other, from the culture of awakening, it becomes a recognizing this disparity between the haves and the have nots. And then from generosity from care from goodwill and from joy to Look for a new way of living, to look towards a life of simplicity look forward, but how to consume less how to have less negative impact on the world? And on those on the underprivileged people, the poor? How can those who have the means use the means to reduce damage that their lives are contributing to the world? And no one feels like they're damaging themselves. And so we don't want to shame anyone, make it obligatory. But how about for ourselves? How do we come from the best qualities of heart, so we're inspired and want to do it, we're happy to change. That's the task. And if we're going to really make a difference in this world, I think it's going to help a lot. If rather than the burden of change, we discover, we work towards try to experience the joy of change, we're moving towards a better lifetime lifestyle to pour is a better way of living, we find how we enhance the wealth in our own heart, and hence the ecology of the heart. So that ecology shines and is rich and valuable. So that the work we do for environment for social justice, for environmental justice, for the welfare of the world around us. Is is not is really feeds us nourishes us from beautiful places within I think that would be the culture of awakening, as we engage in earth care. So this is Earth career week, and we're kind of in the middle of it. And so maybe for this week, and for every week, but especially this week, maybe you

could make this little bit of a theme for the next week, how you can care for the world more than you are already and maybe not to make it and to do that in a way that is not obligatory, not heavy, but really comes from a place of lightness and joy, but does make a difference.

So those are my thoughts for today for Earth carry weekend. Thank you for listening and then we have a couple of minutes before 10:30 I can say that might be nice to tell you that one of the Wonder one of the things I've done in this regard, is after many years of having this wish, finally being able to actualizing it is that Creek I created co created with Suzy Harrington and Kiersten wrote them a training program on for Buddhist eco chaplains. People who are are offer spiritual care in relationship to the non human world. They to the environment and our relationship to the environment, ecosystem. And, and we finished one whole program that ended in September. It's a fantastic group of people. And it's really inspiring to see their dedication and love and activities they were setting themselves up to do as equal chaplains. So that was a wonderful thing. And so that's an example of something that's been part of my life and my joy to offer. And then we're going to start that again. And I think in January, we start the next year of training.

So thank you. And I'm going to stop now and then here on on YouTube in a few minutes. And I'm going to set up the Zoom Room and it'll be probably open before I get there. But I think Bev spiker will say hello to people and I hope it all works. I chose a big zoom account and hope for this time we get in happily, all of us. Thank you for today.