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BUDDHIST WISDOM *for* OUR TIME

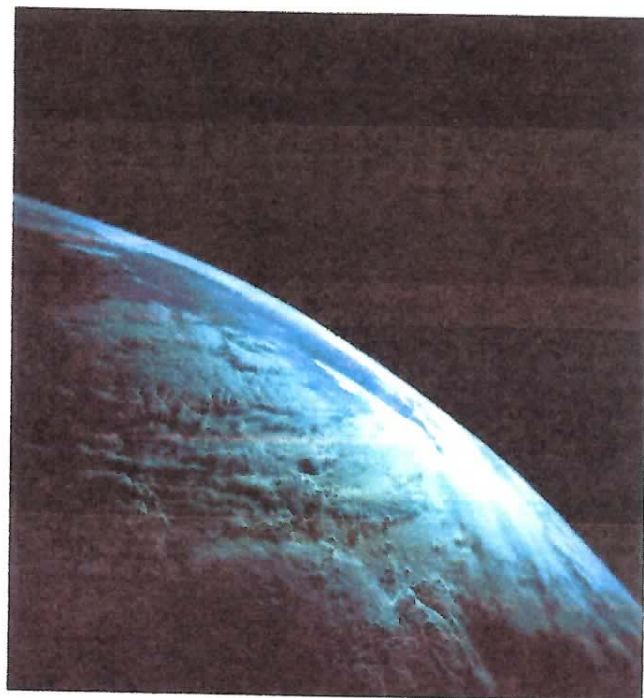
The World We Have

BY THICH NHAT HANH | APRIL 6, 2017



Only when we combine our concern for the planet with spiritual practice will we have the tools to make the profound personal transformations necessary to address the coming environmental crisis. Thich Nhat Hanh offers us the guiding principles for a new ecospirituality of mindful living.

We are like sleepwalkers, not knowing what we are doing or where we are heading. Whether we can wake up or not depends on whether we can walk mindfully on our Mother Earth. The future of all life, including our own, depends on our



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mindful steps. We have to hear the bells of mindfulness that are sounding all across our planet. We have to start learning how to live in a way so that a future will be possible for our children and our grandchildren.

I have sat with the Buddha for a long time and consulted him about the issue of global warming, and the teaching of the Buddha is very clear. If we continue to live as we have been living, consuming without a thought to the future, destroying our forests and emitting greenhouse gases, then devastating climate change is inevitable. Much of our ecosystem will be destroyed. Sea levels will rise and coastal cities will be inundated, forcing hundreds of millions of refugees from their homes, creating wars and outbreaks of infectious disease.

“ We need a kind of collective awakening. The masses are still sleeping. They cannot hear the ringing of the bells.

We need a kind of collective awakening. There are among us men and women who are awakened, but it's not enough; the masses are still sleeping. They cannot hear the ringing of the bells. We have built a system we cannot control. This system imposes itself on us, and we have become its slaves and victims. Most of us, in order to have a house, a car, a refrigerator, a TV, and so on, must sacrifice our time and our lives in exchange. We are constantly under the pressure of time. In former times, we could afford three hours for one cup of tea, enjoying the company of our friends in a serene and spiritual atmosphere. We could organize a party to celebrate the blossoming of one orchid in our garden. But today we can no longer afford these things. We say that time is money. We have created a society in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, and in which we are so caught up in our own immediate problems that we cannot afford to be aware of what is going on with the rest of the human family or our planet Earth. In my mind I see a group of chickens in a cage disputing over some seeds of grain, unaware that in a few hours they will be killed.

The Chinese, the Indians, and the Vietnamese are still dreaming the “American dream,” as if that dream were the ultimate goal of mankind—everyone has to have a car of their own, a bank account, a cell phone, a television set. In 25 years the population of China will be 1.5 billion people, and if each of them wants to drive their own private car, China will need 99 million barrels of oil every day. But world production today is only 84 million barrels per day, so the American dream is not possible for the Chinese, nor the Indians or the

Vietnamese. The American dream is no longer possible for the Americans. We cannot continue to live like this. It is not a sustainable economy.

We have to have another dream: the dream of brotherhood and sisterhood, of loving-kindness and compassion and that dream is possible right here and now. We have the dharma; we have the means; we have enough wisdom to be able to live this dream.

Mindfulness is at the heart of awakening, of enlightenment. We practice breathing to be able to be there in the present moment, so that we can recognize what is happening in us and around us. If what's happening inside us is despair, we have to recognize that and act right away. We may not want to confront that mental formation, but it is a reality and we have to recognize it in order to transform it.

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We do not have to sink into despair about global warming; we can act. If we just sign a petition and forget about it, obviously nothing is going to change. Urgent action must be taken at the individual and the collective levels. We all have a great desire to be able to live in peace and environmental sustainability. What most of us don't yet have are concrete ways of making our commitment to sustainable living a reality in our daily lives. We haven't organized ourselves. We can hardly blame our leaders for the chemicals that pollute our drinking water, for the violence in our neighborhoods, for the wars that destroy so many lives. It is time for each of us to wake up and take action in our own lives.

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Violence, corruption, abuse of power, and self-destruction are happening all around us, even in the community of leaders, both spiritual and social. We all know that the laws of our country don't have enough strength to manage corruption, superstition, and cruelty. Only faith, determination, awakening, and a big dream can create an energy strong enough to help our society rise above and go to the shore of peace and hope.

Buddhism is the strongest form of humanism we have. It came to life so we could learn to live with responsibility, compassion, and loving-kindness. Every Buddhist practitioner should be a protector of the environment. We have the power to decide the destiny of our planet. If we awaken to our true situation, there will be a collective change in our consciousness. We have to do something to wake people up. We have to help the Buddha wake up the people who are living in a dream.

Yet everything, even the Buddha, is always changing and evolving. Thanks to our practice of looking deeply, we realize that the sufferings of our time are different from those of the time of Siddhartha, and so the methods of practice should also be different. That is why the Buddha inside of us also should evolve in many ways, so that the Buddha can be relevant to our time.

The Buddha of our time can use a telephone, even a cell phone, but he is free from that cell phone. The Buddha of our time knows how to help prevent ecological damage and global warming; he will not destroy the beauty of the planet or make us waste all our time competing with each other. The Buddha of our time wants to offer the world a global ethic, so that everyone can agree on a good path to follow. He wants to restore harmony, cultivate brotherhood and sisterhood, protect all of the species of the planet, prevent deforestation, and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

“ *When you practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you become a bodhisattva helping to create harmony, protect the environment, safeguard peace, and cultivate brotherhood and sisterhood.*

As you are the continuation of the Buddha, you should help him offer the world a path that can prevent the destruction of the ecosystem, one that can reduce the amount of violence and despair. It would be very kind of you to help the Buddha continue to realize what he began 2,600 years ago.

Our planet Earth has a variety of life, and each species depends on other species in order to be able to manifest and to continue. We are not only outside of each other but we are inside of each other. It is very important to hold the Earth in our arms, in our heart, to preserve the beautiful planet and to protect all species. The *Lotus Sutra* mentions the name of a special bodhisattva: Dharanimdhara, or Earth Holder, someone who preserves and protects the earth.

Earth Holder is the energy that is holding us together as an organism. She is a kind of engineer or architect whose task is to create space for us to live in, to build bridges for us to cross from one side to the other, to construct roads so that we can go to the people we love. Her task is to further communication between human beings and other species and to protect the Earth and the environment. It is said that when the Buddha tried to visit his mother, Mahamaya, it was Dharanimdhara who built the road on which the Buddha traveled. Although the Earth Holder bodhisattva is mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra*, there is not a chapter devoted entirely to her. We should recognize this bodhisattva in order to collaborate with her. We should all help to create a new chapter for her, because Earth Holder is so desperately needed in this era of globalization.

When you contemplate an orange, you see that everything in the orange participates in making up the orange. Not only the sections of the orange belong to the orange; the skin and the seeds of the orange are also parts of the orange. This is what we call the universal aspect of the orange. Everything in the orange is the orange, but the skin remains the skin, the seed remains the seed, the section of the orange remains the section of the orange. The same is true with our globe. Although we become a world community, the French continue to be French, the Japanese remain Japanese, the Buddhists remain Buddhists, and the Christians remain Christians. The skin of the orange continues to be the skin, and the sections in the orange continue to be the sections; the sections do not have to be transformed into the skin in order for there to be harmony.

Harmony, however, is impossible if we do not have a global ethic, and the global ethic that the Buddha devised is the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are the path we should follow in this era of global crisis because they are the practice of sisterhood and brotherhood, understanding and love, the practice of protecting ourselves and protecting the planet. The mindfulness trainings are concrete realizations of mindfulness. They are non-sectarian. They do not bear the mark of any religion, particular race, or ideology; their nature is universal.

“ *Make your decision, and then act to save our beautiful planet Earth. Changing your way of living will bring you a lot of joy right away.* ”

When you practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you become a bodhisattva helping to create harmony, protect the environment, safeguard peace, and cultivate brotherhood and sisterhood. Not only do you safeguard the beauties of your own culture, but those of other cultures as well, and all the beauties on Earth. With the Five Mindfulness Trainings in your heart, you are already on the path of transformation and healing.

In the First Training we vow to cherish all life on earth and not support any acts of killing. In the Second Training we pledge to practice generosity and not support social injustice and oppression. In the Third Training we make a commitment to behave responsibly in our relationships and not engage in sexual misconduct. The Fourth Training asks us to practice loving speech and deep listening in order to relieve others of suffering.

The practice of mindful consumption and mindful eating is the object of the Fifth Mindfulness Training:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my

body and my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and the transformation of society.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training is the way out of the difficult situation our world is in. When we practice the Fifth Training, we recognize exactly what to consume and what to refuse in order to keep our bodies, our minds, and the Earth healthy, and not to cause suffering for ourselves and for others. Mindful consumption is the way to heal us and to heal the world. As a spiritual family and a human family, we can all help avert global warming by following this practice. We should become aware of the presence of bodhisattva Earth Holder in every one of us. We should become the hand, the arms of the Earth Holder in order to be able to act quickly.

You may have heard that God is in us, Buddha is in us. But we still have a vague notion of what Buddha is in us and God is in us. In the Buddhist tradition it is very clear. Buddha resides inside us as energy—the energy of mindfulness, the energy of concentration, and the energy of insight—that will bring about compassion, love, joy, togetherness, nondiscrimination. Our friends in the Christian tradition speak about the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit as the energy of the Buddha. Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is healing and love. We can speak in the same way of mindfulness, concentration, and insight. The energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight gives rise to compassion, forgiveness, joy, transformation, and healing. That is the energy of a Buddha. If you are inhabited by that energy, you are a Buddha. And that energy can be cultivated and can manifest fully in you.

It's wonderful to realize that we are all in a family, we are all children of the earth. We should take care of each other and we should take care of our environment, and this is possible with the practice of togetherness. A positive change in individual awareness will bring about a positive change in the collective awareness. Protecting the planet must be given the first priority. I hope you will take the time to sit down with each other, have tea with your friends and your families, and discuss these things. Invite bodhisattva Earth Holder to sit and collaborate with you. Make your decision, and then act to save our beautiful planet Earth. Changing your way of living will bring you a lot of joy right away. Then the healing can begin.