BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES *on the Earth Charter*

"It is by bringing together the wisdom and courage of all people on Earth toward a Charter that truly represents the general will of humankind that we will be able to move from an era of sounding warnings, to one of action based on solidarity. It is the solidarity of humanity united in a common struggle that will bring forth a third millennium that shines with the light of hope."

from the Foreword by ***Daisaku Ikeda***

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BOSTON RESEARCH CENTER
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES

on the Earth Charter

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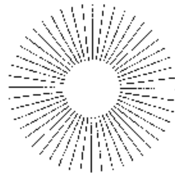
November, 1997



The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) is an international peace institute founded in 1993 by Daisaku Ikeda, a Buddhist peace activist and President of Soka Gakkai International, an association of Buddhist organizations in 128 countries. The BRC fosters dialogue among scholars and activists on common values across cultures and religions, aiming toward a global ethic for a peaceful twenty-first century. Human rights, nonviolence, ecological harmony, and economic justice are focal points of the Center's work.

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Foreword

Since the shocking report, *The Limits to Growth,* was published by The Club of Rome, people's interest in environmental issues has continued to increase. However, the magnitude of environmental destruction that has expanded on a global scale today still surpasses efforts to respond to the crisis, starting with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972.

The threat posed by environmental destruction may not be as obvious as that posed by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. And yet, in terms of the urgency of the crisis confronting humanity, I would contend that the environment cannot be accorded any lesser priority. It is an extremely serious threat, with potentially fatal results to human dignity and the natural environment. We indeed face the dire prospect of "sickness unto death" if we continue to stand by idly.

Underlying the contemporary situation is a civilization that, in the several centuries since the industrial revolution, has stimulated and encouraged the limitless expansion of the human appetite for consumption. We have seen the relentless pursuit of the values of affluence, convenience, comfort, and efficiency during this time. I believe that the first step toward rectifying this state of things requires a fundamental reexamination of the views of and approach to nature, the human being, and the world that have until now sustained modern material civilization. These are the core values that have at once enabled the giant strides of science and technology while at the same time unleashing an infinitude of human desires.

It is important that this process of reflection be conducted in such a way as to bring forth the light of wisdom from each of the cultural and spiritual traditions that human beings have given rise to on earth. For it is from these various sources of wisdom that we can draw forth the direction and energy to transform the course of contemporary civilization and lay the foundations for a true global civilization.

In April, 1996, in a statement issued prior to Earth Day, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) warned that the global environment is in crisis, and that unless there is a major change in direction there will be little meaning in celebrating Earth Day. There have been numerous statistics released that support this grim assessment, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the global environmental crisis cannot be resolved by the mere continuation of the means and measures that have been used to date. In this respect, we are beset with the overwhelming sense that without a major change in direction, a fundamental reassessment and restructuring of the modes and meaning of civilization itself, we will be unable to avoid a truly catastrophic outcome.

Needless to say, the global environmental crisis is not confined to the political, economic, or scientific and technological dimensions, involving only the wise and appropriate allocation and utilization of resources and wealth. It is imperative that we probe such core issues as the relationship between humans and nature, humans and society, as well as between humans and humans, which includes how we perceive nature, our system of values that prescribe our civilization. Humanity is being urged to transform civilization so that it would establish dignity of life in the true sense of the word at the very basis of every possible system of values. I cannot help but feel that a fundamental change in each of our outlooks is being called for at this moment.

It is hoped that the Earth Charter which is being drafted and moved toward adoption will provide a shared ethical basis, common norms of human behavior, that will guide people's efforts to break out of the present crisis. As one who has continued to ponder and work toward the resolution of these problems, I would like to suggest that Eastern thought, in particular Buddhism, is rich in ideas that can provide a philosophical basis for the formulation of such norms.

Central to Buddhist thinking is the concept of "dependent origination," which describes the coexistence and interdependence of humanity, the natural world, and indeed the cosmos. This theory posits a symbiotic order in which the microcosm of the individual is unified with the macrocosm of the universe as a single living entity. As such, it overturns the mechanistic understanding of the

universe that underlies modern scientific thinking and which positions humans as separate and isolated from the rest of existence. It is, rather, an organic view of the universe. What I wish to stress in particular is that in the Buddhist view, this cosmic interdependence is not static, but is filled with the creative dynamism of life.

In the Buddhist scriptures we find the following passage that describes this dynamism: "without life, there is no environment; and life is created and supported by its environment." "Life" (Jp.*shoho*) here means the subject or self which carries on its life-activities; "environment" (Jp.*eho*) the world or environment that surrounds that self. The important point here is the close interrelation between the two, as the self and the environment are two integral expressions of the same ultimate reality or true entity of life; this is not confined to a static relationship of inseparability. Hence, the first and the latter phrases of this expression are not simply placed in a parallel; nor can their order be inverted. The oneness of life and its environment means that even though life is shaped by the environment, and the influence of the environment on life must be reckoned with, it is life, in particular human life, that is the transforming protagonist without which the environment could not exist. The role of the human will is thus central to this dynamic interrelationship.

In recent years, the idea of coexistence, or symbiosis, has gained considerable currency. It is my contention that "symbiosis" in the true sense is to be found in the delicate and exquisite balance between a strong and responsible will to transformation and a warm and loving embrace of the environment. True symbiosis is found in the dynamic interpenetration of these two aspects.

It is hard to overstate the significance of the Earth Charter, which is being undertaken through the united efforts of concerned people throughout the world from all national and cultural backgrounds. The noble motives and efforts towards drafting and adopting this "people's treaty" indeed merit our approbation as an important challenge in human history.

I offer my heartfelt prayers for the rewarding and successful civil society consultations involved in the drafting process. For it is by bringing together the wisdom and courage of all people on Earth toward a Charter that truly represents the general will of human-

kind that we will be able to move from an era of sounding warnings, to one of action based on solidarity. It is the solidarity of humanity united in a common struggle that will bring forth a third millennium that shines with the light of hope. As one who shares the aspirations and dreams of this undertaking, I wish to express my sincere respect for all those whose efforts and involvement have brought this project to its present state of fruition.

This collection of essays by leading Buddhist scholars offers a broad spectrum of insights on the global environmental crisis from a Buddhist perspective. I am confident that this will be most useful in enhancing and deepening the deliberations surrounding the Earth Charter. I take this opportunity to reiterate my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all those involved in this undertaking and pledge myself to continue my own efforts, as one Buddhist, toward the creative resolution of the issues that have inspired it.

—*Daisaku Ikeda*
Founder, Boston Research Center, and President, Soka Gakkai International

Introduction

This collection of essays by leading scholars of Buddhist studies has been undertaken by the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) to support the Earth Charter initiative. We first were introduced to the Earth Charter in February of 1997 when Steven Rockefeller, professor of religion at Middlebury College, presented an early draft at a conference on world religions and ecology held at the BRC. This conference had the aim of forging an environmental ethic across religious traditions—an aim reflected in the Earth Charter, which had been initiated by Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev, co-chairs of the Earth Charter Commission. At about the same time, in early 1997, BRC founder, Soka Gakkai International President Daisaku Ikeda, published his annual peace proposal, "New Horizons of a Global Civilization." In it he pointed to the need for an Earth Charter as a "kind of bond that links people together on a dimension that is noble enough, broad enough, and strong enough to determine the fate of humanity." Since then, BRC has made the Earth Charter a special focus of its programs in order to advance the process of worldwide consultation on the Benchmark Draft, which is being coordinated by Professor Rockefeller on behalf of the Earth Council in Costa Rica.

The idea of publishing a collection of Buddhist perspectives arose from a conversation I had several months ago with Steven Rockefeller. I learned from this conversation that, although wide-ranging consultations with world religious leaders (more than 250 in number) have been conducted, only general endorsements were received. No publications are yet available that attempt to compare the worldview and ethical principles embodied in the Earth Charter with the teachings of any particular tradition. Yet, as Professor Rockefeller notes in his informative overview of the Earth Charter process in the beginning of this booklet, the Charter is meant to articulate a "spiritual vision that reflects universal spiritual values, including but not limited to ethical values." There is clearly a need, therefore, for re-

ligious traditions to examine the Charter in light of their teachings. With Steven Rockefeller's encouragement, the BRC decided to respond to this challenge by soliciting and publishing a series of essays on the Benchmark Draft by key scholars of Buddhist studies. We hope this contribution is only the beginning of a lively public dialogue that will engage religious scholars and practitioners alike from numerous traditions.

In an interview with BRC staff this fall, Maximo Kalaw, director of the Earth Council, spoke of his hope that religious leaders will "do more than just endorse the Charter." One of the Earth Council's main goals is that the Charter inspire religious communities to integrate the principles of sustainable living into their teachings and activities. As Mr. Kalaw went on to say, "The Earth Charter won't fly unless people understand how to translate it into their livelihoods, into their consumption patterns, into the kind of organizations they will work with, the kind of political systems and macroeconomic policies they will support." This is no less true for religious communities than for other communities, but for religious congregations to do this effectively, an important first step is to reflect on the Charter's resonance with the specific teachings of each tradition. Ideally, such reflections would be characterized by a willingness to critique the Charter and to be critiqued by it. This is the spirit in which this booklet is offered.

In soliciting these essays, we were heartened by the affirmative response we received from the scholars invited. All of them were keenly interested in the idea of an Earth Charter, and happy to study it and share their views, even on short notice and at a busy time of year. Since the booklet is meant to be a catalyst to further dialogue, and since time is of the essence (the Earth Council is eager to receive input), we asked only for a brief essay, not an in-depth analysis. We gave each scholar broad latitude in framing his or her comments—i.e., with reference to the Buddhist tradition in general or to a particular tradition, in relation to the texts or to the activities of Buddhist communities, from the standpoint of a scholar or a scholar-practitioner, and so on. Their response yielded a variety of fascinating perspectives, each one of which could lead to further fruitful dialogue and elaboration.

As you read these perspectives, it may be useful to bear in mind the questions we posed for the scholars to consider:

- What do you see as the value of an Earth Charter?
- What parts of the Charter are in agreement with Buddhist ethical formulations?
- Is there a need to strengthen any aspects of the Charter to better express a Buddhist point of view?
- What's missing from the Charter that would be considered essential for a Buddhist to see in such a statement?
- Is there language in the Charter that would be difficult for a Buddhist to accept?

We also circulated to the essayists a chapter written by Steven Rockefeller for a forthcoming book, *Buddhism and Ecology* (ed. by Mary Evelyn Tucker & Duncan Williams. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). This chapter, entitled "Buddhism, Global Ethics, and the Earth Charter," explores the distinctive contributions Buddhist traditions might make to the development of the Earth Charter and poses several specific questions concerning issues that may be controversial from a Buddhist standpoint. For example:

- Do Buddhist teachings offer a way to reconcile the notion of "intrinsic value" (in principle #1) with Buddhist doctrines of dependent co-arising and impermanence?
- Would there be support among Buddhists for strengthening principle #15 regarding the treatment of non-human sentient beings?
- Would the use of "rights" language in regard to other living creatures be considered acceptable?
- As some have suggested, if language were added to the Charter referring to the "sacredness" of life, would a Buddhist support such terminology?

Further, based on discussions with Professor Rockefeller, we requested specific suggestions for language regarding warfare and combat weapons that might be added to the Charter's peace principle (#7).

The valuable perspectives that emerged from the contributing authors' reflections on these questions speak for themselves, so I will not attempt to summarize or compare them here. Suffice it to

say that each entry is infused with compassion, a sense of serious purpose, and a profound appreciation for the web of life the Earth Charter seeks to protect and restore. We are grateful to these scholars for their thoughtful contributions. We hope their imaginative responses to the Charter inspire readers to consider how the Charter's vision and principles accord with their own worldview and ethical beliefs.

—Virginia Straus
Executive Director,
Boston Research Center

The Earth Charter

BENCHMARK DRAFT

Approved at Rio+5 – March 18, 1997

Earth is our home and home to all living beings. Earth itself is alive. We are part of an evolving universe. Human beings are members of an interdependent community of life with a magnificent diversity of life forms and cultures. We are humbled before the beauty of Earth and share a reverence for life and the sources of our being. We give thanks for the heritage that we have received from past generations and embrace our responsibilities to present and future generations.

The Earth Community stands at a defining moment. The biosphere is governed by laws that we ignore at our own peril. Human beings have acquired the ability to radically alter the environment and evolutionary processes. Lack of foresight and misuse of knowledge and power threaten the fabric of life and the foundations of local and global security. There is great violence, poverty, and suffering in our world. A fundamental change of course is needed.

The choice is before us: to care for Earth or to participate in the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. We must reinvent industrial-technological civilization, finding new ways to balance self and community, having and being, diversity and unity, short-term and long-term, using and nurturing.

In the midst of all our diversity, we are one humanity and one Earth family with a shared destiny. The challenges before us require an inclusive ethical vision. Partnerships must be forged and cooperation fostered at local, bioregional, national, and international levels. In solidarity with one another and the community of life, we the peoples of the world commit ourselves to action guided by the following interrelated principles:

1. ***Respect Earth and all life. Earth, each life form, and all living beings possess intrinsic value and warrant respect independently of their utilitarian value to humanity.***

2. *Care for Earth, protecting and restoring the diversity, integrity, and beauty of the planet's ecosystems. Where there is risk of irreversible or serious damage to the environment, precautionary action must be taken to prevent harm.*

3. *Live sustainably, promoting and adopting modes of consumption, production, and reproduction that respect and safeguard human rights and the regenerative capacities of Earth.*

4. *Establish justice and defend without discrimination the right of all people to life, liberty, and security of person within an environment adequate for health and spiritual well-being. People have a right to potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil, and food security.*

5. *Share equitably the benefits of natural resource use and a healthy environment among the nations, between rich and poor, between males and females, between present and future generations, and internalize all environmental, social, and economic costs.*

6. *Promote social development and financial systems that create and maintain sustainable livelihoods, eradicate poverty, and strengthen local communities.*

7. *Practice non-violence, recognizing that peace is the wholeness created by harmonious and balanced relationships with oneself, other persons, other life forms, and Earth.*

8. *Strengthen processes that empower people to participate effectively in decision-making, and ensure transparency and accountability in governance and administration in all sectors of society.*

9. *Reaffirm that Indigenous and Tribal Peoples have a vital role in the care and protection of Mother Earth. They have the right to retain their spirituality, knowledge, lands, territories, and resources.*

10. *Affirm that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development.*

11. *Secure the right to sexual and reproductive health, with special concern for women and girls.*

12. *Promote the participation of youth as accountable agents of change for local, bioregional, and global sustainability.*

13. *Advance and put to use scientific and other types of knowledge and technologies that promote sustainable living and protect the environment.*

14. *Ensure that people throughout their lives have opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, and practical skills needed to build sustainable communities.*

15. *Treat all creatures with compassion and protect them from cruelty and wanton destruction.*

16. *Do not do to the environment of others what you do not want done to your environment.*

17. *Protect and restore places of outstanding ecological, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual, and scientific significance.*

18. *Cultivate and act with a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the Earth Community. Every person, institution, and government has a duty to advance the indivisible goals of justice for all, sustainability, world peace, and respect and care for the larger community of life.*

Embracing the values in this Charter, we can grow into a family of cultures that allows the potential of all persons to unfold in harmony with the Earth Community. We must preserve a strong faith in the possibilities of the human spirit and a deep sense of belonging to the universe. Our best actions will embody the integration of knowledge with compassion.

. . . .

In order to develop and implement the principles in this Charter, the nations of the world should adopt as a first step an international convention that provides an integrated legal framework for lasting and future environmental and sustainable development law and policy.

The Earth Charter

AN OVERVIEW

by Steven Rockefeller

It is the objective of the Earth Charter to set forth an inspiring vision of the fundamental principles of a global partnership for sustainable development and environmental conservation. The Earth Charter initiative reflects the conviction that a radical change in humanity's attitudes and values is essential to achieve social, economic, and ecological well-being in the twenty-first century. The Earth Charter project is part of an international movement to clarify humanity's shared values and to develop a new global ethics, ensuring effective human cooperation in an interdepedent world.

There have been numerous Earth Charter consultations and efforts to draft a Charter over the past ten years. An Earth Charter Commission has recently been formed by the Earth Council and Green Cross International. The Commission has prepared a Benchmark Draft Earth Charter, and it plans to circulate a final version of the Charter as a people's treaty beginning in mid-1998. The Charter will be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2000.

I. Historical Background, 1945-1992

The role and significance of the Earth Charter are best understood in the context of the United Nations' ongoing efforts to identify the fundamental principles essential to world security. When the UN was established in 1945, its agenda for world security emphasized peace, human rights, and equitable socioeconomic development. No mention was made of the environment as a common concern, and little attention was given to ecological well-being in the UN's early years. However, since the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, ecological security has emerged as a fourth major concern of the United Nations.

Starting with the Stockholm Declaration, the nations of the world have adopted a number of declarations, charters, and treaties that

seek to build a global alliance that effectively integrates and balances development and conservation. In addition, a variety of nongovernmental organizations have drafted and circulated their own declarations and people's treaties. These documents reflect a growing awareness that humanity's social, economic, and environmental problems and goals are interconnected and require integrated solutions. The Earth Charter initiative builds on these efforts.

The World Charter for Nature, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1982, was a progressive declaration of ecological and ethical principles for its time. It remains a stronger document than any that have followed from the point of view of environmental ethics. However, in its 1987 report, *Our Common Future,* the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) issued a call for "a new charter" that would "consolidate and extend relevant legal principles," creating "new norms…needed to maintain livelihoods and life on our shared planet" and "to guide state behavior in the transition to sustainable development." The WCED also recommended that the new charter "be subsequently expanded into a Convention, setting out the sovereign rights and reciprocal responsibilities of all states on environmental protection and sustainable development."

The WCED recommendations, together with deepening environmental and ethical concerns, spurred efforts in the late 1980s to create an Earth Charter. However, before any UN action was initiated on the Earth Charter, the Commission on Environmental Law of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) drafted the convention proposed in *Our Common Future.* The IUCN Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development presents an integrated legal framework for existing and future international and national environmental and sustainable development law and policy. Even though the IUCN Draft Covenant was presented at the United Nations in 1995, official negotiations have not yet begun on this treaty which many environmentalists believe is urgently needed to clarify, synthesize, and further develop international sustainable development law.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, did take up the challenge of drafting the Earth Charter. A number

of governments prepared recommendations. Many nongovernmental organizations, including groups representing the major faiths, became actively involved. While the resulting Rio Declaration on Environment and Development is a valuable document, it falls short of the aspirations that many groups have had for the Earth Charter. It does not reaffirm commitment to the World Charter for Nature, and its anthropocentric emphasis is a step back from the more balanced approach of the World Charter for Nature. The Rio Declaration does call for the protection and restoration of ecosystems, but it does not affirm the intrinsic value of all life forms and articulate clearly a principle of respect for nature. Unless human beings adopt an attitude of respect for Earth and come to appreciate the intrinsic value of all life, it is unlikely that they will make the radical changes in behavior required to achieve protection of the environment and a sustainable civilization.

II. The Earth Charter Project, 1994-2000

A new Earth Charter initiative began in 1994 under the leadership of Maurice Strong, the former Secretary General of UNCED and chairman of the newly formed Earth Council, and Mikhail Gorbachev, acting in his capacity as Chairman of Green Cross International. The Earth Council was created to pursue the unfinished business of UNCED and to promote implementation of Agenda 21, the Earth Summit's action plan. Jim MacNeill, former Secretary General of the WCED, and Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of The Netherlands were instrumental in facilitating the organization of the new Earth Charter project. Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun of Algeria served as the executive director of the project during its initial phase, and its first international workshop was held at the Peace Palace in The Hague in May 1995. Representatives from thirty countries and more than seventy different organizations participated in the workshop. Following this event, the secretariat for the Earth Charter project was established at the Earth Council in San José, Costa Rica.

A worldwide Earth Charter consultation process was organized by the Earth Council in connection with its independent Rio+5 review in 1996 and 1997. The Rio+5 review was organized to comple-

ment and contribute to the official 5-year review of UNCED that culminated with Earth Summit II, involving a UN General Assembly Special Session in June 1997. The objective of the independent and official reviews was to assess progress toward sustainable development since the Rio Earth Summit and to develop new partnerships and plans for implementation of Agenda 21. The Earth Charter consultation process engaged men and women from all sectors of society and all cultures in contributing to the Earth Charter's development. A special program was created to contact and involve the world's religions, interfaith organizations, and leading religious and ethical thinkers. An indigenous peoples network was also organized by the Earth Council.

Early in 1997, an Earth Charter Commission was formed to oversee the project. The twenty-three members were chosen on the basis of their commitment to the cause and their ability to advance the project. They represent the major regions of the world and different sectors of society. The co-chairs include Kamla Chowdhry of the Centre for Science and the Environment, New Delhi (Asia); Mikhail Gorbachev of the International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies, Moscow (Europe); Mercedes Sosa, a performing artist from Buenos Aires (Latin America); Maurice Strong (North America); and General Amadou Toumani Touré, former president of Mali (Africa).

The Commission issued a Benchmark Draft Earth Charter in March 1997 at the conclusion of the Rio+5 Forum in Rio de Janeiro. The Forum was organized by the Earth Council as part of its independent Rio+5 review, and it brought together more than 500 representatives from civil society and national councils of sustainable development. The Benchmark Draft reflects the many and diverse contributions received through the consultation process and from the Rio+5 Forum. The Commission extended the Earth Charter consultation until early 1998, and the Benchmark Draft is being circulated widely as a document in progress. It is hoped that many organizations will conduct their own workshops on the Benchmark Draft and report their findings and recommendations to the Earth Council. A number of workshops and conferences in different regions of the world have taken place and many more are being planned.

At the end of the consultation period, a final version of the Earth Charter will be prepared. The Commission is scheduled to announce the final version after its June 1998 meeting. There will then follow a period of advocacy on behalf of the Earth Charter with the goal of enlisting wide support for the document and its principles in civil society, religious communities, and national councils of sustainable development. Special efforts will be made to promote the adoption of Earth Charter values in all sectors of society and to integrate Earth Charter values into educational programs. With a demonstration of wide popular support, it is hoped that the Earth Charter will be endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2000.

III. The Earth Charter Concept

A consensus has developed that the Earth Charter should be: a statement of fundamental principles of enduring significance that are widely shared by people of all races, cultures, and religions; a relatively brief and concise document composed in a language that is inspiring, clear, and meaningful in all tongues; the articulation of a spiritual vision that reflects universal spiritual values, including but not limited to ethical values; a call to action that adds significant new dimensions of value to what has been expressed in earlier relevant documents; a people's charter that serves as a universal code of conduct for ordinary citizens, educators, business executives, scientists, religious leaders, nongovernmental organizations, and national councils of sustainable development; and a declaration of principles that can serve as a "soft law" document if endorsement by the UN General Assembly can be secured. It is hoped that the Earth Charter will inspire regional, national, local, religious, and other groups to develop their own charters that give expression to the universal values of the Earth Charter within a framework and in a language appropriate to their distinctive traditions. The Earth Council will actively promote this process.

The Earth Charter concentrates on fundamental principles. It does not seek to set forth the many practical and legal implications of these principles. It leaves to the IUCN Draft Covenant on Environment and Development and other hard law treaties to lay out in

full the legal principles that should guide state behavior and interstate relations. The Earth Charter endeavors to complement and support the IUCN Draft Covenant by making clear the fundamental principles that are the ethical foundation for the Covenant. In addition, when the Earth Charter is finalized it will be accompanied by supporting materials that discuss the goals and actions that will lead to implementation of Charter principles.

The Earth Charter Commission does not plan to turn the drafting of the Earth Charter over to a formal intergovernmental process. It attaches special importance to the role of the Charter as a people's treaty, and it is concerned to ensure a very strong document that reflects the emerging new global ethics. UN endorsement of the Earth Charter is an important objective. However, quite apart from the UN, the Earth Charter can serve as a powerful influence for change.

The Earth Charter project draws upon a variety of resources, including ecology and other contemporary sciences, the world's religious and philosophical traditions, the growing literature on global ethics and the ethics of environment and development, the practical experience of people living sustainably, as well as relevant intergovernmental and nongovernmental declarations and treaties. At the heart of the emerging new global ethics and the Earth Charter is an expanded sense of community and moral responsibility that embraces all people, future generations, and the larger community of life on Earth. Among the values affirmed by the Benchmark Draft are: respect for Earth and all life; protection and restoration of the diversity, integrity, and beauty of Earth's ecosystems; sustainable production, consumption, and reproduction; respect for human rights, including the right to an environment adequate for human dignity and well-being; eradication of poverty; nonviolent problem solving and peace; the equitable sharing of Earth's resources; democratic participation in decision making; gender equality; accountability and transparency in administration; the advancement and application of knowledge and technologies that facilitate care for Earth; universal education for sustainable living; and a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the Earth community and future generations.

The Earth Charter Commission

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For additional information on the Earth Charter, contact: The Earth Council, P.O. Box 2323-1002, San José, Costa Rica. Website: http://www.ecouncil.ac.cr.

Comments and recommendations regarding the Benchmark Draft may be forwarded directly to Steven Rockefeller, Professor of Religion at Middlebury College, who is coordinating the drafting process for the Earth Charter Commission, at: P.O. Box 648, Middlebury, VT 05753 (fax: 802-388-1951; e-mail: rockefel@panther.middlebury.edu)

BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES *on the Earth Charter*

Hope, Desire, and Right Livelihood: A Buddhist View on the Earth Charter

by Grace G. Burford

GRACE G. BURFORD serves on the faculty of the Integrative Studies program at Prescott College in Prescott, Arizona. In addition to her academic training and research in the History of Religions, with a specialty in Buddhist Studies, Dr. Burford brings to the discussion of earth ethics a personal commitment to the principles of feminism and the spiritual values of Deep Ecology.

Today's scientific community agrees, with a remarkable degree of unanimity, that the ecological destruction humans have already caused precludes any reasonable expectation that we can ever recover the health of our environment. No matter what we do, what we have already done has determined the fate of our planetary home; its demise is only a matter of time.

How do we proceed, how do we act, in the face of such a prediction? For many, denial works best—all those scientists must be wrong. This response typically leads to the conclusion that humans might as well just go on behaving as we have all along, as if Earth's resources will continue to fulfill all our demands forever. Those of us who cannot deny the validity of the scientists' conclusions must choose between two courses of action. We could relinquish all hope, and—like those who deny the problem's very existence—live our lives following the old patterns that brought

"The scientists may be right; it may be too late for us to prevent environmental disaster on a planetary scale. Still, the Buddhist model suggests that if we hope to counteract the environmental crisis, we should attempt to undermine the selfish desire that causes it."

about this situation. Or we might acknowledge such a pessimistic outlook as realistic, but choose to act out of hope that somehow, someday, we will prove it wrong.

As an attempt to develop guidelines for constructive human behavior in the face of the environmental destruction of our planet, the Earth Charter project reflects an attitude of hope. Those who contribute to this project, as well as those who eventually adopt the Charter, may acknowledge that the prospects for our planet look dim, but choose to act responsibly and constructively anyway. By facing the hard truth of our environmental situation, we can break through the paralysis that denial causes, and find the inspiration and power to act in the face of overwhelming odds.

As an attempt to develop a universal environmental ethic, the Earth Charter process faces the challenge of trying to derive consensus among widely divergent worldviews. Even if enough people choose to act constructively, out of hope, in the face of our environmental crisis, will we agree about how to act? Can the Earth Community agree on a universal ethic? The authors of the Earth Charter have called on a wide range of groups to contribute to this document. This approach should foster a sense of ownership among the diverse constituents of the Earth Community. But will it achieve consensus? Many representatives of the world's religions have contributed to this process. Their participation makes sense, given that the religions of the world have functioned traditionally as keepers of human ethics. But to what extent can representatives of rival claims to religious truth agree on universal principles of any kind? Human history presents innumerable instances of human conflict based on religious disagreements.

Luckily, the area of most overlap and agreement among religious worldviews turns out to be ethics. Although persons of different religions often disagree as to why killing is wrong, they tend to agree that killing is wrong. Likewise with stealing, cheating, lying, and generally mistreating others. Even in this area differences arise, as in the occasional religious advocacy of specific instances of killing. But if we stick to the realm of general ethical principles, most humans agree. In essence, the Earth Charter requires only this: that those who care enough about the fate of our planet to change their behavior agree to certain general ethical guidelines.

Representatives of religions can contribute to this process in two ways. First, they can help determine what those universal guidelines will include. Second, they can carry the guidelines back to their communities and promote their application. Before I contribute in the first way here, I would like to clarify what religion I represent. I have been asked at two junctures in this process to contribute, as a Buddhist, to the development of the Earth Charter. No one can speak for the entire Buddhist community, least of all someone like myself. I represent a rather small group of Buddhists, namely Western academic Buddhists. I do consider myself a Buddhist in personal, spiritual terms, but academia (both teaching and research) defines my community and frames most of my public Buddhist activities. My main academic interest lies in early Buddhist thought, texts, and philosophy, and my religious outlook reflects a heavy influence of Deep Ecology.

> Shun evil, do good, purify one's mind—this is the teaching of all the buddhas.
>
> *Dhammapada* 183

In this succinct statement we find the universal, if rather vague, essence of ethics: the imperative to "shun evil" and to "do good." The particularly Buddhist instruction to "purify one's mind" provides a clue as to the kinds of activities that constitute evil and good, in Buddhist terms. Good actions clarify the mind, evil actions cloud it. Ultimately, purity of mind enables one to see reality as it really is; Buddhists call this accomplishment enlightenment. One achieves enlightenment through ethical action, guided by compassion, and through the kind of intensive meditation often associated with Buddhist practice. One popular form of Buddhist meditation illustrates the compassionate ethic, as the meditator focuses on the *Metta Sutta*, in which the overarching aspiration for the happiness of all beings includes the often-quoted line, "Just as a mother would risk her own life to protect her child, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart toward all that lives."

According to Theravada Buddhist tradition, in the first sermon the Buddha gave after he attained enlightenment he taught the Four Noble Truths. These four truths set up a useful model for action in which one (1) identifies the problem at hand, (2) determines its

cause, (3) asserts the possibility of remedying the problem by eliminating the cause, and (4) delineates the method for eliminating the cause of the problem. The problem the Buddha addressed in his first sermon, and many times afterward, was that in this life we inevitably experience pain mixed in with pleasure. The Buddha's observation applies to all that disappoints us in our lives, from the minor inconveniences and frustrations of daily life, to the more tragic events. He identified the cause of this problem as our insatiable desire to hold on permanently to impermanent objects (things, people, ideas...). The Buddha claimed that—although such shortsighted desire inevitably leads to suffering, frustration, and disappointment—our ignorant desire is not inevitable. He observed that humans can eliminate this problem by seeing the true nature of impermanent things, which eliminates ignorant desire. He delineated a method for achieving this goal, namely the Noble Eightfold Path.

Traditionally, Theravada Buddhists divide this path into three segments: wisdom, meditation, and ethics. They include three of the eight parts of the path in the ethics segment: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Right Speech advises one to avoid lies, harsh or rude language, gossip, backbiting, and slander. Right Action recommends that one avoid the five categories of action addressed in the Five Precepts that all Buddhists (lay and monastic) undertake to follow: not to kill, steal, lie, misuse sex, or indulge in intoxicants. Right Livelihood applies these principles to one's work life, admonishing us to make a living without harming others; it specifically names certain livelihoods as off-limits, such as trading in arms or intoxicants, killing animals, and stealing or cheating.

We can apply these basic Buddhist teachings to the process of developing an environmental ethic. Indeed, the Benchmark Draft of the Earth Charter already reflects most of these points. The environmental problem we face reflects the more general problem the Buddha identified in the first Noble Truth. Environmental degradation mars the awesome beauty of our world, everywhere we turn. Whether one experiences the natural world by hiking, boating, going for a drive, watching nature shows on television, or just looking out a window, one cannot avoid observing the impact of human environmental destruction. The preamble of the Earth Charter eloquently expresses this mixture of environmental pain and pleasure, as it acknowledges both the awe-inspiring beauty and complexity of Earth and the presence of "great violence, poverty, and suffering in our world."

According to the Buddha's second Noble Truth, everything unsatisfactory about our lives derives from desire based on a fundamental ignorance about the nature of reality. Similarly, the cause of our environmental woes lies in our insatiable desire to possess and consume natural resources, an approach that reflects a fundamental ignorance of the limits of Earth's resources. We would do well to note, with the Earth Charter preamble, that "the biosphere is governed by laws that we ignore at our own peril." The limited nature of our planetary resources underlies all the laws of the biosphere.

Having identified the problem and its cause, the Buddha asserts in the third Noble Truth the possibility of remedying the situation. One can eliminate all pain and suffering and disappointment in life by letting go of selfish desire. The Buddha claims this on the basis of his own experience, and this claim has inspired countless Buddhists to follow the path he describes in the fourth Noble Truth. Unfortunately, we do not have such reassurances concerning the environmental crisis we now face. The scientists may be right; it may be too late for us to prevent environmental disaster on a planetary scale. Still, the Buddhist model suggests that if we hope to counteract the environmental crisis, we should attempt to undermine the selfish desire that causes it. Thus the Earth Charter's principles include the imperatives to "Live sustainably, promoting and adopting modes of consumption, production, and reproduction that respect and safeguard human rights and the regenerative capacities of Earth [3]" and to "Advance and put to use scientific and other types of knowledge and technologies that promote sustainable living and protect the environment [13]."

The path or method for ending the process of environmental destruction must employ ethical guidelines for positive human action, such as those of the Earth Charter. Certainly environmental activists can adopt, unaltered, the Buddhist recommendations concerning Right Speech. Lying, speaking harshly or rudely, gossiping, backbiting, and slandering generally do not contribute to effective activism in any endeavor. The Earth Charter speaks to the need for

humans to treat all life with respect, which surely must include speaking gently to all beings we encounter. The Buddhists' Five Precepts of Right Action contribute helpful guidelines for achieving environmental objectives. The first four, virtually universal precepts relate to environmental concerns about human destruction of life, and human dishonesty and insensitivity in our actions toward the natural world and each other. The Earth Charter directly reflects the Buddhist's first precept of avoiding killing in its imperatives to respect all life (1), establish justice (4), and practice nonviolence (7). The Buddhist advice against stealing emerges specifically in the Charter's imperative to share natural resources equitably (5). The Charter reflects the Buddhist's intention to avoid dishonesty in its efforts to include traditionally less powerful groups in its principles (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12), since the powerful have always used dishonesty to oppress the groups they marginalize. Similarly, the document as a whole stands as an honest statement in the face of dishonest denial of our environmental situation. The Charter reflects the Buddhist concern with appropriate sexual relations in the imperatives that address the issues of reproductive health (5 & 11) and gender equality (5 & 10).

The fifth precept contributes a specifically Buddhist perspective on an earth ethic. Traditionally, the Buddhist advice to avoid intoxicants derived from the meditator's need to see clearly, in order to undermine the ignorance and desire that account for all our difficulties in life. In the context of environmental issues, this precept speaks directly to the rampant human obsession with material objects. Just as alcohol or drugs can cloud the mind, thus blocking a meditator's ability to see the true nature of reality, consumerism blinds all of us to the true condition of our planet. Marketers around the world bombard us with the message that happiness lies in acquisition of more and more things, and we buy both the message and the material goods, if we can. Intoxicated by endless acquisition, we ignore what we know to be true—that we are consuming our planet. Certain imperatives of the Earth Charter reflect our need to shake off the intoxicating power of material consumerism, including most clearly the third one, concerning sustainable living (cited above). The entire document reflects an awareness of the need to avoid acquisitive intoxication, considering the fact that in order

to respect all life (1), care for Earth (2), defend the rights of people [and other beings] to "potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil, and food security" (4), have "benefits of natural resource use" to share equitably (5), promote social development (6), empower people (8) including Tribal Peoples, women, and youth (9 & 10 & 12), we must change our basic habits of acquisition and consumerism.

Given the impact of rampant human acquisition, the environmental interpretation of Right Livelihood would probably preclude not only livelihoods based on trade in arms and alcohol and meat, but also those involving the promotion of material consumerism. This could raise considerable dissent, even in environmental circles. The Earth Charter states that we must be willing to "act with a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the Earth Community" (18), but this ideal challenges us when it comes to decisions about how we make our way in the world financially. Can we agree to consider destructive livelihoods off-limits? Can we advocate an end to trade in weapons, or alcohol and other drugs, or meat and other animal products, without causing debilitating conflict even in our own ranks? What about the livelihoods that depend on and promote the kind of rampant consumerism that currently devours our planet's resources? From a Buddhist perspective, all these intoxicants detract from "the well-being of the Earth Community." We have seen that the Buddhist path includes not only precepts against killing and stealing and the like, but also stipulates—apparently somewhat redundantly—that one should not make a living by any of these means, either. If the Earth Charter were to follow this model, it would include guidelines concerning particular livelihoods that contribute to environmental destruction. In this context, the Earth Charter's final imperative's (18) notion of "shared responsibility" could play a significant role. Until we come to some kind of consensus about undertaking as a group the kind of difficult changes Right Environmental Livelihood requires, any effort on the part of conscientious individuals to implement such changes may achieve nothing more than the individuals' own economic insecurity. Yet this kind of radical change holds the greatest promise of actually making a positive difference in our world.

The Benchmark Draft of the Earth Charter could be improved by stating more definitively the destructive role of human greed

and taking on the issues raised by an ideal of Right Livelihood, but the document as a whole passes the basic Buddhist worldview ethics test. So what? Many others have noted the kind of affinities between Buddhist thought and environmental issues that I have pointed out here. Proponents of other religious perspectives have carried out similar efforts vis-a-vis their traditions. Despite the fact that the Earth Charter's authors no doubt will have to refine some language in the document to avoid alienating certain factions of its supporters, I foresee no debilitating obstacles to developing an Earth Charter that many people will eventually confirm. But, given the conservative, business-controlled, unlimited-growth-oriented nature of most of the world's governments, one has to ask where the value lies in this Earth Charter endeavor. Governments, more than any other sector of our world community, demonstrate the truth of the destructive consequences and addictive characteristics of dependence on material consumerism. Many environmental activists have concluded from harsh personal experience that if change will come, it must take place at the grassroots level. So why bother with an Earth Charter?

One answer lies in the very power of the world's governments. The member nations of the UN exercise unparalleled power on our planet. If we can establish a standard of environmental behavior at this level, impressive results could follow. An even more compelling answer derives from the need for a global support network for the work and aspirations of individuals.

In Theravada Buddhism, each Buddhist undertakes the Five Precepts of Right Action over and over again, within the context of the practicing community. Rather than privately vowing once and for all never to kill, steal, lie, misuse sex, or use intoxicants, these Buddhists recite the Five Precepts at every Buddhist ceremony, with the entire community of practitioners speaking aloud in unison. By this recitation, each individual repeatedly affirms her or his commitment to this ethic: that person will strive to avoid killing, stealing, lying, misusing sex, and indulging in intoxicants. Such group repetition indicates the nature of these precepts as a community ideal to which each individual constantly aspires. The group does not overtly participate in enforcement of the precepts, although peer pressure can help keep a person on the path. Only the individual practitioner can carry out the precepts, but each one does so in the context of the community.

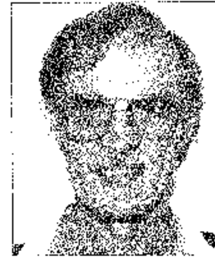
Like the Theravada Buddhist practitioner's Five Precepts, a successful Earth Charter could represent an ideal, a standard none of us—as individuals or countries—may live up to unfailingly forever, but which merits continuous personal and group commitment. This parallel emerges in the language of the Charter's preamble, which introduces the document's imperatives with the phrase,

> In solidarity with one another and the community of life, we the peoples of the world commit ourselves to action guided by the following interrelated principles.

If successful, the Earth Charter could enable us to take the kind of bold steps that represent the best hope for the survival of our home. That seems worth the effort.

How Can Mahayana Buddhists Take Responsibility for the Earth?

by David W. Chappell



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All life exists in the balance between structure and freedom, but the recent freedom that humans have achieved through science and technology has created the present dilemma which threatens the health and survival of many forms of life on earth, including humans. To avoid such destruction, the Earth Charter represents the first effort to build a widespread consensus for channeling human freedom toward protecting the earth's ecosystems and all life forms. Although Buddhism has a reputation for wisdom, compassion, and respect for all life, there are various parts of the Earth Charter that challenge traditional Buddhist practices and that need attention.

"The implication of the Earth Charter is that if Buddhists are to be responsible, they will have to find ways to act not just individually, but collectively."

Collective Responsibility

The Preamble to the 1997 draft of the Earth Charter speaks to the "Earth Community." This beginning is quite different from Bud-

dhist ethics in the past that has always affirmed how individuals are responsible for their own destiny. Instead of individual fates, the draft document assumes a common human community in which the destinies of each are intertwined with the choices and fate of others. Although Buddhists have long affirmed the interdependence of all reality, and that the fate of an individual is not separate from other individuals, never before has there been the means for the global community to confer, nor was there sufficient knowledge to be able to understand and discuss the fate of the earth's ecosystem as a whole.

In the past Buddhists were urged to suffuse the ten directions with compassion, but responsibility for the well-being of others was not implied. (Aronson) Later, Mahayana Buddhists vowed to save all beings, which meant taking responsibility to help them all, but even the most practical forms of saving actions were toward others one at a time. (Chappell, 1996a) The Earth Charter, however, assumes that we are acting not just as individuals, but as societies, and ultimately as a global community. Not only do we have the means to consult and decide together, but through our governments, media, and corporations, we have power to legislate, oversee, and rearrange economic and environmental structures in ways that stretch far beyond our individual lives to affect the quality of life for vast numbers. By contrast, the individual ethic of the Buddhist middle way involving the avoidance of addictions *(trishna)* and the cultivation of personal virtues may provide valuable practices to reduce human greed and consumption, but in its usual expressions (as in Gross, 1997) it remains an individual ethic suited to a lost past without facing the complexities of the modern world.

The implication of the Earth Charter is that if Buddhists are to be responsible, they will have to find ways to act not just individually, but collectively. So far, Buddhist collectivity has been much weaker than either Christian or Muslim. On the one hand, this has meant that they have avoided a history of collective bloodshed such as the crusades or holy wars. But on the other hand, Buddhists have been notorious for the ease with which they have been exploited by dictatorships, not only by the governments of China, Korea, and Japan in the past, but more recently by the military government in Burma, a country that has the most Buddhist population on earth.

Only since 1945 have Buddhists begun to develop international assemblies, medical missions to other countries, and assistance with international refugee problems. Wars have thrown the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh into the international arena not because of their care for the world but through their exile from their home countries. (Fortunately, they have turned this tragedy into a virtue and become innovative leaders as international Buddhists.) As late as 1997, the only Buddhist representatives at the United Nations from the rich nations of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan have not been the traditional clergy, but the new lay Buddhist movements that have developed mainly since 1945, namely, Rissho Koseikai, Soka Gakkai International, and Won Buddhism. Although Mahayana has preached the ideal of compassion, with few exceptions (such as Ven. Cheng-yen of the Tzu-chi Foundation in Taiwan, H.H. Dalai Lama, and the lay Buddhist groups just mentioned) it has largely been non-Mahayana Buddhists who have led the way in this century in applying compassion to society (with early leaders like Ambedkar in India and Bhikkhu Buddhadasa in Southeast Asia, and recent activists such as Sulak Sivaraksa, A.T. Ariyaratne, and Phrakhru Pitak Nanthakhun). Thus, the Earth Charter gives Mahayana Buddhists a clear challenge to find practical ways to live their message of compassion more fully.

Collective Accountability

A major problem for making collective decisions and taking collective responsibility is accountability. An important omission from the Earth Charter is a commitment to national, regional, and global information gathering on resource depletion, restoration, and distribution as a necessary check on accountability. Although measuring the well-being of ecosystems is difficult, our popular press regularly has a variety of charts to give indicators for capital development. What is needed in our weekly news magazines like the *Economist* or *Business Week*, and in our daily newspapers, is a concern to provide indexes and grafts that measure not just economic growth, stocks, and relative capital distribution, but the health of our environment and fate of our natural resources. Every day the Dow Jones, S&P 500, and weather are reported, but only recently

has the health of the planet been news. In addition to reporting the growth or decline of the gross domestic product (GDP), we need reports on the growth or decline of vital natural resources, as well as the health and welfare of animals and humans.

What the Earth Charter does not give, but which could be included in the Earth Charter, is a mandate to report the numbers and demographics of other beings and the earth resources to keep track of how well we are caring for the earth, living sustainably, establishing justice, sharing equitably, practicing nonviolence, and so on. When the bodhisattva vows to save all beings, the news could be more precise in letting the bodhisattva know exactly how many beings there are, in what kinds of ecosystems they thrive and the state of their health, what the needs for recovery are, and what governments and corporations of bodhisattvas should do to help.

How Committed to Earthly Life are Mahayana Buddhists?

According to Lambert Schmithausen, the leading authority on early Buddhist attitudes toward nature, Buddhists broke with their fellow ascetics, the Jains, by asserting that laity should not feel guilty for killing plants and would not accumulate bad karma from farming and harvesting crops. Jains, by comparison, believed that even fresh water was alive and criticized Buddhists for drinking it. Nevertheless, Buddhists did prohibit killing animals and did have a concern for plants since trees were to be protected as the homes of tree deities, while monks and nuns provided the ideal by not injuring plants or seeds. (Schmithausen 1991a and 1991b) This traditional regard for nature and animals has been a source of inspiration for recent Buddhist environmental activists.

In Mahayana Buddhism, an apparent bonding with nature took place by emphasizing the unity of all existence through such doctrines as *buddhatā*, *dharmatā*, *śūnyatā*, and *dharmakāya*, in which all natural phenomena, rocks, trees, stars, and animals were seen as manifestations of the Buddha. In East Asia this idea became expressed vividly in phrases borrowed from Taoism, such as the statement of Sengzhao (384-414?) that "Heaven-and-earth and I are of the same root; the ten thousand things and I are of one body."[1] In addition, Mahayana went beyond the injunctions of early Buddhism

simply to avoid all evil and to cultivate all good, by adding the ethical commitment to save all beings, which universalized Buddhist responsibility for all life.

In spite of these noble Mahayana developments, such leading Buddhist scholars as Schmithausen, Kajiyama Yuichi, and Kamata Shigeo all agree that the Mahayana idea that all things are a manifestation of the Buddha is such an abstract concept that it had no ethical force at all. (*Buddhism and Nature* 1991) Furthermore, along with its noble and universal vision, Mahayana also developed innumerable ways to avoid responsibility:

> In Mahayana Buddhism, life is made easier by a whole set of practices to get rid of bad karma. One of them is cultivating the insight, or even the mere belief, that everything, hence also the evil act or the distinction between good and evil, is ultimately void. Others are worshipping or merely evoking a Buddha, or celestial Bodhisattva or his name, and muttering Dhāraṇīs or performing ceremonies of pacification or atonement. (Schmithausen 1991b, 10)

Mahayana not only found many ways to erase the bad karma for individuals for committing earthly destruction, but subordinated the need for concrete actions by giving priority to the life of the mind. In his doctoral analysis, Luis Gomez argued that Mahayana extended the idea that ascetics attained great mental powers by asserting in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* that the psychic power of advanced practitioners had the capacity to produce an image of reality. Since, according to the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, our ordinary world merely consists of illusory images manifested by ultimate reality (dharmadhatu), then the advanced practitioner can produce images that are the equivalent of our ordinary world. As a consequence, all achievement including ethical achievement can be accomplished with the mind alone. As the *Gaṇḍavyuha* states:

> Having understood that the world's true nature is mind, you display bodies of your own in harmony with the world. Having realized that this world is like a dream, and that all Buddhas are like mere reflections, that all principles are like an echo, you move unimpeded in the world. In an instant you show your own

body even to [all] the people in the three times. Yet, in your mind there is no [mental] process of duality and you preach the Principle in all directions.[2]

Although it is a common Buddhist idea that the conventional world of illusion and suffering is created by the mind, not all Buddhists agree with the Mahayana notion that the real world, free of delusion, is created by the mind. But like many forms of medieval religiosity worldwide, Mahayana expressed a devaluation of external, physical action in the world as illusory. Monastic seclusion was seen not just as a helpful way to save oneself and others, but as a sufficient and ideal way to save others. Since the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and its larger text, the *Flower Ornament Scripture*, are core texts of East Asian Buddhism, the commitment to protecting physical life made by the Earth Charter would mean a major change of view for many East Asian Buddhists since it means taking seriously the enduring effect on the world of physical degradation or physical protection of the environment. Fortunately, a few Mahayana texts praise physical actions as superior to just mental ones,[3] although this attitude has been a minority view that was often invisible in Mahayana Buddhism until recent decades.

The Buddhist Contemplation of Death

Another area needing clarification in regard to the Earth Charter is the Buddhist understanding of the meaning of death. While the destruction of life forms arouses a sense of crisis for environmentalists, Buddhists have been taught to cultivate non-attachment to both living and dying. While naturalists mourn the extinction of rare species, Buddhists may mourn but also remind themselves that everything that is born will die. One of the earliest forms of Buddhist meditation consisted of practitioners going regularly to the crematorium grounds to contemplate dead bodies at various stages of decay and to recognize that their bodies were just like those. Accordingly, some may wrongly interpret the Buddhist lack of panic in the face of death as a lack of caring, but that would miss the point. Rather, this training in how bodies decay was a form of reality therapy to remove a false sense of permanency and privilege for

humans, while nurturing a sense of commonality and kinship with all life.

The kinship (different from ownership) that Buddhists came to feel with nature and the earth was expressed in Chinese Buddhist phrases such as "The willow is imbued with the subtle form of Avalokitesvara," or "The sound of the pines is the preaching of the Law and the saving of sentient beings." (*Buddhism and Nature* 1991, 43-44) Nature was seen as responsive to those who were enlightened, so that cut flowers did not wilt for seven days while Shandao (613-681) was in meditation,[4] and for three years two deer and other animals wandered among the monks listening to Ox-head Master Farung when he give dharma talks, while lotus flowers appeared in the ice and snow when he lectured on the *Lotus Sutra*.[5] Similarly, the presence of a later Ox-head patriarch, Hui-jung, restored a withered wisteria vine upon his return to the monastery, and when a magistrate asked to see his disciples, he tapped on his seat and three tigers appeared with a roar.[6]

In addition to this sense of kinship with nature, most Chinese Buddhists became convinced that compassion toward all life forms was a necessary and integral part of their own path to enlightenment, fulfillment, and freedom. (Chappell 1997) Although they had not yet singled out ecosystems as objects of attention, they found other methods of being inclusive of all other realms of reality, such as the T'ien-t'ai emphasis on the identity of the ten realms (hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, demons, humans, heavenly beings, monastics, hermits, bodhisattvas, and buddhas), or the idea of "three thousand worlds in a single moment of consciousness," or the view that even rocks and trees have the Buddha nature. So the Earth Charter articles that affirm the intrinsic value of all things in their interrelatedness and that emphasizes responsibility for the whole earthly ecosystem is not inconsistent with at least the Lotus Sutra, T'ien-t'ai, and Nichiren Buddhist traditions. Where they differ, and where discussion is needed, is on the Buddhist view of the interchangeability of life forms through the doctrine of rebirth which removes the finality of extinction and lessens the urgency of concrete action.

In a practical sense, the Earth Charter also challenges Buddhists to show how their acceptance of the birth and death of everything

(including individuals, species, and Buddhism itself) does not make Buddhists insensitive to the needs of others, but can be conducive to constructive action. While seeking to avoid attachment to a deluded sense of permanency, Buddhists could show on the positive side how non-attachment lessens desire for consumer goods and the accumulation of unnecessary possessions as a way to protect the environment. Buddhists could change temple aesthetics to highlight nature and simplicity rather than the ostentatious and ornamental. After seeing our mutual frailty and interdependence, and after inwardly bonding with other beings in the midst of our coming and going, Buddhists could take more responsibility for concrete action to help other life forms. Buddhist green activists could seek ways to develop consensus with non-environmentalists to promote understanding and action on environmental issues. Thus, the Earth Charter challenges Buddhists to reshape their contemplation on death to serve as a means not only to reduce attachment but also to lessen consumption, and to evolve their sense of kinship and responsibility toward all beings into finding new forms of local partnership, global collaboration, and concrete action.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that among contemporary Mahayana Buddhists it is the laity who are most active in their concern for the environment, whether as individuals or as groups. Since in the face of modern challenges, the distinctive Mahayana ethic of vowing to save all beings is not being implemented by Buddhist clergy in a practical way, then leadership in the ethical sphere has passed from the clergy to the laity. This marks a major change and is a serious challenge to the traditional Buddhist hierarchy, not unlike the early days of the Mahayana movement.

It is now reported that by the age of eighteen the average American young person will have been exposed to 800,000 TV commercials.[7] In order to balance these messages advocating consumption, the Earth Charter needs to urge supporters to require our media to provide regular information about how much the earth is being depleted by various forms of recreation and manufacturing, just as cancer warnings now appear on cigarette packages. Another way to

assist children to be more aware of the goals of the Earth Charter is to simplify its prose. If Buddhist models of inner transformation are to be used, the language also needs to be made more rhythmic to assist memorization and chanting. Cumbersome details can always be appended as commentary.

While the Earth Charter affirms life in the body and in society, what is added by Buddhist social activism are spiritual resources. While involved in the world, Buddhists not only affirm that their happiness is tied to the happiness of others, but they cultivate spiritual practices for clarity, empowerment, and harmonization. Practices similar to Buddhist forms of mindfulness, insight, repentance, and dedication may become a necessary preparation for achieving the lofty ideals of the Earth Charter. Just as each business promotes its products and its own kind of culture, the implementation of the Earth Charter must involve both outer legislation and inner transformation. Whether and how this dimension can be placed within the Earth Charter and become part of the process will require further cooperative work, but it could be part of the other types of "knowledge," "values," and "compassion" mentioned in principles 13, 14, and 15. The Dalai Lama has recently emphasized "secular meditation" and "secular ethics," while Ikeda Daisaku is now promoting forms of peace education and dialogue beyond religious differences: both of these international Buddhist leaders are supporting humanistic forms of spiritual cultivation that may provide the kind of foundation needed to implement the noble and urgent goals of the Earth Charter.

Notes

1. This phrase is found in Sheng-zhao's *Zhao-lun*, and Kamata Shigeo remarks that it is based on a phrase from Zhuangzi's *Qi wu lun*, and was echoed in later Chinese Buddhist writers such as Cheng-guan of the Tang Dynasty. (*Buddhism and Nature*, 42-43)

2. *Gaṇḍavyūha* 302.22-24, tr. by Luis Gomez, *Selected Verses from the Gaṇḍavyūha: Text, Critical Apparatus and Translation* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1967; reprinted by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1968): lxxvi.

3. The few texts that value life in society by laity and physical actions over the life of withdrawal and contemplation by monastics are the Upasaka Sutra, the Ugra Sutra, and the Lotus Sutra.

4. *Wang-sheng hsi-fang ching-t'u jui-ying shan chuan*, Taishō 51.105b.27-29.

5. *Hsü Kao-seng chuan*, Taishō 50.604.

6. Tao-yuan, *The Transmission of the Lamp: Early Masters*, tr. by Sohaku Ogata (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1990): 101.

7. This statistic was reported on CNN on September 19, 1997.

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The Earth Charter and Ecology Monks in Thailand

by Susan M. Darlington

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Across Thailand a small yet growing number of Buddhist monks engage in ecological conservation and sustainable development. The projects these "ecology Monks" (*phra nak anuraksa*, in Thai) initiate and support are, in many ways, examples of the principles of the Earth Charter in practice. Together with local villagers the monks establish and sanctify protected community forests, set up fish and wildlife sanctuaries and experiment with different forms of integrated agriculture to find methods most appropriate for local environments. The monks educate villagers in ecological discourses and work with them to balance their economic and spiritual needs with the urgency of protecting the natural environment.

Here is how I see a few of the principles of the Earth Charter reflected in the work of Thai ecology monks. These monks are unaware of the Earth Charter, so the connections made here are mine, not theirs. The significance of

"The full potential of the Earth Charter lies in how it is perceived, interpreted, and acted on by people in local areas.... Its relevance to and adaptation by...Buddhist and local cultural perspectives will enable the document's abstract principles to be applied to concrete situations and begin to have an effect on the world's environment and well-being."

the similarities for me is that the case of the Thai ecology monks illustrates both the potential relevance of the charter and the possibilities of putting it into practical action in a Buddhist culture.

I've chosen to focus on a few of the Charter's principles which seem to me most closely to articulate what the ecology monks are already engaged in. The projects discussed below were all initiated by Phrakhru Pitak Nanthakhun, a monk in the northern Thai province of Nan, with the support of local environmental and developmental nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and the villagers themselves. Phrakhru Pitak is thirty-nine and has been a monk or novice since he finished elementary school at the fourth level *(pratom sii)*. Born and raised in the mountains, he witnessed the disappearance of much of the forest as land was cleared for logging and farming. He saw the connections between human action and the conditions of the natural environment. For his first eighteen years in the Sangha, Phrakhru Pitak preached an abstract connection between the Buddha's teachings and ecological well-being. His message went unheeded, and the destruction of forests and watersheds continued. Phrakhru Pitak then visited activist monks in other parts of Thailand in 1990. He realized that his preaching was too abstract for the villagers whose primary concerns were feeding their families and meeting basic needs. He changed his approach to put his preaching into practice, initiating projects to educate and engage villagers in conservation and sustainable living. Although his projects are ongoing and the oldest has been underway for less than eight years, shifts in villagers' attitudes and pockets of protected forest and wildlife sanctuaries can be seen as the result of his work.

Just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has only been truly effective where it is accepted in terms of local cultures and values and implemented through concrete and explicit programs, so should we think about how the principles of the Earth Charter can be taken beyond the Charter itself and put into practice. The work and teachings of Phrakhru Pitak and other ecology monks provide one model for how this process might be done.

The Charter's first principle, "Respect Earth and all life," emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living beings. This concept is the underlying message in all of Phrakhru Pitak's work. He repeatedly teaches the villagers that the ecological projects he promotes are

not only for their benefit, but for all beings within the environment. For example, when he sets up and sanctifies a community forest, he insists that the local people do not hunt within the protected area. Community forestry is a rapidly growing approach in the environmental movement in Thailand, usually established by secular organizations and local communities. When Buddhist monks are not involved, it is rare to include prohibitions against hunting. The emphasis usually focuses on preserving and regenerating the forest for the use of local people and to protect watersheds.

"Live sustainably, promoting and adopting modes of consumption, production, and reproduction that respect and safeguard human rights and the regenerative capacities of Earth," is the third principle in the Charter. One of the major concerns of ecology monks is the rising consumerism which seems to drive Thai society. A common theme in talks by Phrakhru Pitak, for example, is that people in Thai society have become too dependent on material goods and desire money in order to buy things, such as refrigerators and trucks, which they do not really need. The use of these products contributes to the destruction of the natural environment, through their manufacture and pollution, and deforestation, through clearing land to grow cash crops in order to buy material goods. The desire for things which a consumer-driven cash economy promotes, he argues, represents greed, one of the three root causes of suffering in Theravada Buddhist thinking. Instead, he assists the villagers to use integrated agriculture, planting numerous species along with fish ponds and raising domestic animals. The goal is first to grow enough food to feed one's family, only selling any surplus to meet other necessary costs, such as the education of one's children. Phrakhru Pitak teaches through example and practical action the destructive potential of consumerism and also that it is not necessary for a healthy, contented life.

The integrated agricultural projects also relate to the Earth Charter's thirteenth and fourteenth principles, concerning, first, the advancement and use of scientific knowledge and technologies that promote sustainable living and, second, opportunities for people "to acquire the knowledge, values, and practical skills needed to build sustainable communities." Like other ecology monks, Phrakhru Pitak works closely with environmental NGOs to bring new tech-

niques and knowledge to the rural villagers who are struggling to earn a living and feed their families. Without offering such alternatives, including the knowledge, techniques, and materials necessary to begin sustainable or integrated agricultural projects, the villagers would be unlikely to participate in or maintain the programs.

In order to enable villagers to undertake new agricultural projects and try new sustainable methods, existing systems of agriculture and financing which contribute to environmental destruction must first be challenged. These systems in Thailand include monocropping and cash cropping, often requiring continual clearing of forest land as the methods deplete the soil and contribute to erosion in the mountains. In northern Thailand these types of farming have been encouraged among villagers by the National Agricultural Bank. In Thailand's recent Social and Economic Development Plans the rapid economic development and industrialization of the nation are emphasized. Phrakhru Pitak criticized the National Agricultural Bank in his district of Nan Province for promoting feed corn as the primary crop. Villagers took on debts as they borrowed from the government to buy seed, fertilizer, and pesticides, but gained little from planting corn over several years. The soil became worn out and eroded, forcing farmers to clear more forest to repay their debts, and waterways were polluted by the chemicals used.

This example highlights the need for the Earth Charter's sixth principle, to "promote social development and financial systems that create and maintain sustainable livelihoods, eradicate poverty, and strengthen local communities." Breaking out of destructive financial and social systems is the first step towards implementing this principle. The case in Nan Province demonstrates, however, the potential opposition to changing what is a lucrative structure for some segments of Thai society. As Phrakhru Pitak (and some other ecology monks in different parts of the country) advocated self-reliance and sustainable living, he was initially criticized by both public and Sangha officials for undertaking work inappropriate for a monk and was even threatened by businessmen. He continued his work despite the opposition since his goal was social change based on Buddhist principles. His emphasis remained on creating new systems—social and financial—which enable people to live sustainably. He worked carefully to address the concerns of various

segments of society and involved people from all sectors in planning and promoting his projects. Government officials, military officers, teachers, journalists, nongovernment organization staff, and monks from all ranks began to participate in his programs. Gradually, through his own hard work and commitment and that of the villagers with whom he worked, and through the results of various projects, he won over many of the critics as they recognized the value of his goals. The result of a successful project, according to Phrakhru Pitak, would be less poverty and stronger local communities.

Building local communities lies at the heart of all Phrakhru Pitak's programs. He introduces many of the projects into local areas, but it ultimately falls to the villagers themselves to implement and maintain them. For example, after establishing a sanctified community forest through a tree ordination ceremony, a local committee takes on the responsibility for monitoring and protecting the forest. The communities are educated as part of the planning stages, in both the techniques and rationale behind the projects and the underlying spiritual principles. Youth are given active roles and continually educated by the community and the monks in ecological responsibility as part of their spiritual training (the Earth Charters' twelfth principle). Phrakhru Pitak himself leads a "dhamma walk" summer ordination program for up to fifty boys every year. The novices walk through the district, living with people in various villages and witnessing the struggles with the environmental destruction and poverty they face daily. They engage in projects with the villagers dealing with these problems. Another monk regularly accompanies children from his village on walks through the forest, teaching them the values of the natural environment and how they can peacefully live in and protect it.

Phrakhru Pitak stresses compassion and co-dependence between humans and other living beings, teaching through words and example the mutual responsibility all beings have for the well-being of the world and each other. Although the language of co-dependence is not in the final Earth Charter principle (number 18), the concept of shared responsibility leading to "respect and care for the larger community of life" expresses the message Phrakhru Pitak is promoting.

Phrakhru Pitak does not only promote his own interpretation of Buddhism and Buddhist values in his work. He recognizes the spirit beliefs of the villagers, although he has commented that in his view spirit beliefs are not part of Buddhism. They are part of the villagers' religious system, however, and Phrakhru Pitak respects and uses these beliefs to further the effectiveness of, and gain the people's cooperation in, his projects. Before the tree ordination consecrating his home village's community forest, for example, the villagers held a ceremony requesting the permission and assistance of the local guardian spirit in protecting the forest. The respect the monk has for existing village values and beliefs enables him to gain the trust and assistance of the villagers and furthers the potential for effective programs. The success of any of the ecology and sustainable development projects depends on the commitment and participation of the villagers as the people who are ultimately responsible for implementing and following through on it.

Similarly, the full potential of the Earth Charter lies in how it is perceived, interpreted, and acted on by people in local areas throughout the world. Its relevance to and adaptation by, in this case, Buddhist and local cultural perspectives will enable the document's abstract principles to be applied to concrete situations and begin to have an effect on the world's environment and well-being. The comparison between the Charter's principles and the work and teachings of Phrakhru Pitak helps to demonstrate the potential of the Charter's value and the need for it to be implemented in practical and culturally relevant manners.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE EARTH CHARTER

by Rita M. Gross

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Can a document, a "people's treaty" such as the proposed Earth Charter, make any difference in stemming the seemingly unstoppable suicidal rush to global ecological catastrophe due to excessive consumption and population growth? Speaking as a Buddhist, I would suggest that apart from real changes in people's minds and hearts, an inspiring document is quite useless. On the other hand, throughout the ages, many people in many faiths have been moved by inspiring, provocative, and challenging words to change their behaviors.

"A change of mind and heart, from valuing and wanting more, which drives both excessive consumption and overpopulation, to contentment with much more moderate, but sustainable and sufficient reproduction and consumption, is essential and mandatory."

The key issue is not the language of the document but whether, individual by individual, people are moved away from self-centered, egotistical behaviors (including concern for the "ego" of a narrow, limited group) to a genuine realization that the survival of the earth community is at stake. Even realizing

the enormous stakes, many will not change their behaviors until they recognize that living sustainably, in terms of both reproduction and consumption, is not a deprivation. As a Buddhist, I would suggest that nothing will be really effective in changing the current destructive patterns of reproduction and consumption without a transformation of consciousness such that people recognize that having *more*, whether more consumables or more children, is not what makes human life worthwhile, joyful, or serene. Short of that recognition and conversion, individuals, driven by their own egotism, will put their own pleasure, which they mistakenly think depends on more consumables and/or more children, before the survival of the planet and its ecosystem. Can the language of the Earth Charter foster such a change of heart and mind?

As a Buddhist and as a scholar of religions, I believe that the strongest point in the document as currently worded is the principle: "Do not do to the environment of others what you do not want done to your environment." This minimal ethical guideline is agreed upon by all religious traditions and is clearly in accord with the most basic Buddhist ethical value—non-harming. The simplicity of the principle is compelling and its logic irrefutable. No one has grounds to claim that they deserve special dispensation to consume or reproduce above sustainable and sane levels. Everyone is equally called upon to practice restraint and respect for universally valid and applicable principles. And stating the Golden Rule in its "negative" rather than its "positive" form is, in my view, more powerful. We may disagree about an ideal lifestyle, but no one wants to live in an overcrowded, ugly, polluted environment that can no longer provide adequate food, water, and shelter to all its inhabitants, human and non-human. It would be hard to make a cogent or ethical case that I should be at liberty to impose such an environment on others even though I do not want to live in such an environment. Because this principle is so basic, I would suggest that it be moved from its relatively obscure position near the end of the Earth Charter to become the very first principle, since all the other principles of the document are dependent upon and derivative from this simple principle.

I have stressed several times that, as a Buddhist, I would emphasize that inner personal transformation is most basic. A change of

mind and heart, from valuing and wanting *more*, which drives both excessive consumption and overpopulation, to *contentment* with much more moderate, but sustainable and sufficient reproduction and consumption, is essential and mandatory. I do not see enough awareness of the necessity for that internal transformation in the current draft of the Earth Charter nor any guidelines for how to encourage and promote such change. I would encourage more direct language about these concerns.

I am also concerned that the central cause of the impending ecological disaster, even greater numbers of people wanting to consume at ever higher levels, is not sufficiently singled out, named, and emphasized. Without keen attention to the fact that population must be stabilized, if not reduced, and habits of consumption drastically altered, the rhetoric about "respecting Earth and all life" in the first principle of the current document amounts to precious little. An Earth Charter that is vague and unclear about the most urgent changes that must be made to preserve the Earth community would probably harm the Earth, through consumption of trees for paper, more than it would help save the Earth.

Certainly foremost to be included in the habits of consumption that need drastic alteration is the obscene level of consumption of military goods, both by nations that can "afford" them and those that surely cannot. Manufacture and use of military goods and personnel are among the leading causes of pollution, environmental degradation, and poverty. Furthermore, unless weapons of mass destruction are renounced and eliminated, the language about nonviolence in the Earth Charter would not have much effect. I do not believe that renouncing violence and weapons of mass destruction hinders the deployment of a police force to deal with crime. The principle and practice of non-harming does not entail letting others cause grave harm and suffering. Rather, one who harms others in any way, including criminal activity, is stopped from engaging in such activities by using the minimum amount of force necessary to do so. Surely the Earth Charter could adopt language of forswearing the use of a military and weapons of mass destruction while granting to civilian governments the use of a police force—armed appropriately lightly—to contain anti-social and criminal activity.

It has been suggested that the language of the Earth Charter

relies heavily on a new ecological worldview emerging from the sciences, a worldview that emphasizes the unity of the biosphere, the interdependence of humanity and nature, the interconnectedness of all life forms, and the importance of biodiversity (as well as cultural diversity). I cannot imagine that anyone seriously acquainted with the Buddhist worldview could find fault with this basic vision of interdependence, since interdependence is the most basic premise and building block of all Buddhist thinking. From the earliest schools of Buddhism to the present day, no matter what other complexities have emerged, all Buddhists contemplate interdependence as utterly basic to our existence as humans. In a certain sense, it might even be possible to suggest that the new ecological paradigm is confirming, in a different way and on a grander scale, what Buddhists have always known—there is absolutely no independent entity that stands alone, that can survive apart from its matrix anywhere in any world system. As individuals, human beings certainly do not exist independently of each other and their environment; the new ecological paradigm drives home with convincing force that as a species we are equally interdependent with the biosphere. Unfortunately, as a species we now have developed the power to alter and destroy the biosphere, but given our utter dependence on our Earth-home, such actions spell our own doom.

If interdependence is taken as the core Buddhist teaching regarding the issues discussed in the Earth Charter, then certain guidelines regarding other moral issues are relatively clear-cut. Buddhist tradition has always regarded non-human and human beings as on a continuum, rather than as morally distinct and separate. A telling traditional phrase, "mother sentient beings," says it well. This phrase means that, from beginningless time in the ceaseless round of rebirth, all beings have at some time had the most intimate of relationships with ourselves: they have been our mother. Without needing to believe literally in rebirth, which could not be presumed in a document like the Earth Charter, the value being articulated is clear: one tries not to harm one's mothers, the sentient beings with whom we share the planet. Another very widespread teaching simply applies the basic guidelines of non-harming and the golden rule to all beings. As we do not want to suffer, so we should not cause other beings to suffer. Concern for the suffering of animals and practices

to minimize that suffering have a long history in Buddhism. In the context of the ecological worldview, such concerns can easily be extended to include protecting the environment in which beings live and upon which we all depend. At the same time, it must also be realized that Buddhism has always included the practical recognition that non-harming is an ideal toward which we strive and that the practice is minimizing the harm inflicted on other beings in order to survive. The ecological worldview, with its keen understanding of interdependent food chains, does not imagine a world in which some individuals do not suffer in fostering the life of other individuals. This practical reality needs to be recognized in the Earth Charter, along with the moral requirement to minimize the harm inflicted on sentient beings by our lives.

Some of the language of the Earth Charter strikes me as unduly Western and, therefore, perhaps inappropriate. Among the ringingly Western phrases are "intrinsic value," "sacredness of life" (a term often discussed during the drafting of the Charter), and "rights." While it is difficult to find language that is truly neutral and universal, at least the potential limitations of these Western phrases should be recognized.

Interestingly, from a Buddhist point of view, the very stress on interdependence makes each of these phrases problematic. Each of these terms seems to depend upon and foster *self-cherishing*, to use a common Buddhist phrase, rather than clearly recognizing the impermanence, emptiness, and interdependence of the individual ego or self. This point is often difficult for those unfamiliar with Buddhism to understand; while Buddhism regards life, especially human life, as a great opportunity, what is significant about each life is not what separates it from its matrix—its individuality or "ego"—but what it shares with everything else. Terms like "intrinsic value," "sacredness of life," and "rights," especially as they have been used in Western discourse, are directed to the individual as separate, not to that which underlies and is more real than transient individuality.

In Buddhist terms, the purpose of all lives is the same—the joy, tranquillity, and liberation of recognizing reality as it is in enlightenment. And that recognition transcends the egohood of a private unique eternal self. Therefore, ideal conditions are those that foster

recognition of one's true nature, not one's individuality. Buddhism has always claimed that being human is the most conducive situation for recognizing one's true nature; thus while all sentient beings equally merit non-harming, humans are regarded as the most fortunate. However, Buddhism has also always emphasized a point that is critical to the concerns of the Earth Charter: humans are able to realize their spiritual potential only under certain conditions, only when basic material and psychological needs have already been met. Thus the quality of human life, not the quantity of humans or their ability to consume excessively, is what makes human life valuable. In fact, overpopulation and excessive consumption erode the conditions that make the human realm fortunate because the matrix for life is pushed past its carrying capacity, and the material and psychological foundations for meaningful spiritual life are destroyed. The point of being human is not merely to exist, to consume and reproduce, but to wake up to one's true nature.

Buddhists have been very reluctant to name that true nature underlying transient egohood, out of concern that it would immediately be construed as an ego or self. Nevertheless, some Buddhist traditions, especially those with the most lyrical appreciation of the natural world and humanity's need to fit into rather than dominate nature, have called that which transcends the ego of individuality "Buddha nature," meaning that all beings, even all of phenomenal reality, have the capacity to be awakened and to promote awakening. For that reason alone, beings and nature are to be appreciated and cherished in all their finitude, impermanence, changeability, and transience. Their cherishing does not depend on an immutable, intrinsically existing, sacred self. I would suggest that the Earth Charter's current focus on intrinsically valuable individuals is misplaced, in that it is not truly in accord with the ecological worldview. Rather, I believe that the Earth Charter would benefit from language that recognizes the importance of appreciating and cherishing the web of life in all its intricacy, variety, and kaleidoscopic changeability.

THE EARTH CHARTER: A NICHIREN BUDDHIST VIEW

by Yoichi Kawada

YOICHI KAWADA has been Director of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy in Tokyo, Japan since 1988. Trained as a physician, Dr. Kawada has written widely on Buddhism and medical science. His recent research, published in the Journal of Oriental Studies, *has been on "Buddhism and Bioethics in Present-day Medicine" and "The Era of the Environment and Buddhism."*

The thirteenth-century Japanese priest Nichiren (1222-1282) established a unique interpretation of Buddhism based on the Mahayana tradition, especially the teaching of T'ien-t'ai (538-597). Nichiren actively sought to rescue people from their suffering and to promote both individual happiness and the prosperity of society as a whole. His philosophy is best represented by the *Risshō ankoku-ron* (Establishment of the Legitimate Teaching for the Protection of the Country), his major treatise, presented to the country's ruling authorities in 1260. In this work, Nichiren maintains that by establishing and spreading the True Law it becomes possible to create a Buddha Land and a Treasure Land. To paraphrase, the Buddha Land means a peaceful world of humanity, while the Treasure Land is synonymous with a wholesome, well-balanced ecosystem of Earth.

"To be truly faithful to... Buddhist ideals, we must build a system of human security on a global level, a system that needs no recourse to military might or weapons, and consolidate the system by strengthening its moral and spiritual foundations—compassion, control of desires, and mutual trust among people."

From the standpoint of Nichiren Bud-

dhism, I believe it is possible to define the Earth Charter as a set of basic principles and behavioral norms necessary for the realization of *risshō ankoku* (world peace and human security founded in the establishment and propagation of the True Law) in our time. With that assumption, I would like to comment first on the eighteen guiding principles and then on the Preamble and concluding paragraphs of the draft charter.

A. Guiding Principles of Action

In examining the principles of action, I will approach my discussion in two parts: Treasure Land and Buddha Land.

1. Treasure Land—Symbiosis with the Earth's Ecosystem

The Buddhist concept expressed by the term Treasure Land relates directly to harmony between human beings and the earth's ecological system, which is the basic premise of a healthy environment. In Nichiren Buddhism we also encounter such concepts as "insentient beings and sentient beings," "enlightenment of plants," and "oneness of life and its environment," all derived from the worldview known as dependent origination, or causation.

Generally, sentient and insentient beings are distinguished according to whether they have emotions and consciousness. Plants and inorganic matter, like rock, are insentient beings, while humans and animals are sentient beings. The expression "enlightenment of plants" refers to the Buddhist principle that insentient beings, too, can attain Buddhahood. However, as concepts, sentient beings and insentient beings are part of a single continuum, and as such are indivisible. In modern biology, as well, this particular distinction is not necessarily very meaningful.

In Indian Buddhism, only human beings are believed to be capable of attaining enlightenment by virtue of their wisdom, and the Buddha nature is reserved exclusively for sentient beings. In China and Japan, on the other hand, not only grass and trees but such nonliving entities as mountains and rivers are considered to be potentially enlightened. The East Asian view of nature thus recognizes the sanctity of life in all living beings and their nonliving environment.

Miao-lo (711-782), of the T'ien-t'ai school in China, asserted that in a single flower blooming in the field or a forest filling the air with fragrance there is the Buddha nature. Very much part of this East Asian tradition, Nichiren held firmly to the view of nature that considers the entire ecosystem to be intrinsically sacred, including scenery and landscapes.

Reverence for all forms of life expressed by Miao-lo and Nichiren are congruent with the concept of deep ecology that underlies the rights of nature and biological rights. The idea that even grass and trees can attain enlightenment provides the basis for biospheric egalitarianism.

While Buddhism grants equality to all living beings, it also recognizes the singularity of humans among all forms of life. What sets people apart from other creatures is their ability to practice the bodhisattva way. Human beings alone can perceive the reality of an interdependent world based on the principle of dependent causation. That perception makes it possible for humans to act for the benefit of the ecosystem and provide protection for other forms of life. In short, they are endowed with the capacity to act with mercy and practice nonviolence in their relation not only to other people but also to all living beings and their environment.

To be sure, living human beings, like any other biological entities, are sustained by the ecosystem itself and other animals and plants. But humans alone can apprehend the sources of their being and, in gratitude, can act for the benefit of those that support their existence. The bodhisattva way is crystallized in that kind of merciful human action.

In order to practice the bodhisattva way, first we must appreciate the reality that our very existence is sustained by the interdependent world of nature. Then, as one manifestation of our deep gratitude, we must control our desires and change our lifestyles.

That means, for one thing, that we must observe the Buddhist precept against killing animal life. That is to say, we must practice nonviolence and mercy and live in such a way that we can maintain our coexistence within a healthy ecosystem.

Explaining the precept against killing animal life, the Sutra of Brahma's Net says,

> No form of life should be killed on purpose. The bodhisattva must always have compassion and piety and use every means to protect all living entities.

"On purpose" here implies without necessity. We should not destroy or kill animals without good reason. Killing out of wrath, greed, or ignorance is absolutely forbidden. On the other hand, it is permissible to slaughter cattle for our own survival. In order to save ourselves from starvation, we need to kill animals at times, but it is incumbent upon us to feel gratitude to them for providing a source of our existence and also to exert ourselves to act in our capacity as protector of the ecosystem.

Insofar as our existence is dependent on and sustained by other living beings, we must learn to live with minimum needs and to be content with what little we have. Passages in the Sutra of Buddha's Last Instruction read, "The principle of contentment is precisely the way to peace and comfort," and "Those who cannot be content with the way things are, in fact are poor, even though they may be wealthy."

The section on the precept against theft in the Sutra of Brahma's Net proscribes theft done out of greed: "Do not steal on purpose any of another's property, not even a needle or a blade of grass." As the same sutra also admonishes, "A bodhisattva must always evoke from the Buddha nature compassion and devotion to help any and every kind of person, to bring about good fortune, and to provide comfort."

Underlying these teachings are the basic ethical principles of Buddhism: that you should never seek your own happiness at the expense of someone else's happiness, and you should treat others in the way that you wish them to treat you. In today's world, these principles could be taken to mean, concretely, that we—as a country or as individual people—should never seek our own prosperity at the expense of people in less developed countries. Rather, we must practice the bodhisattva way through our willingness to share the suffering of the impoverished and by making every effort, working together with them, to bring them out of their predicament.

"Oneness of life and its environment" *(esho funi)* becomes a viable concept only when it is based on compassion, nonviolence,

and control of earthly desires, as described above. Miao-lo writes, "Both subjective and objective realities are already present in a single mind. How could a single mind be divisible? Even then, the presence of those realities is the truth." Nichiren developed this idea as follows:

> The ten directions are "environment" and sentient beings are "life." Environment is like the shadow and life, the body. Without the body there can be no shadow. Similarly, without life, environment cannot exist, even though life is supported by its environment.

In other words, human beings and the environment influence each other in a chain of actions and reactions, beginning with human activities and their formative impact on and subsequent changes in the environment. These in turn induce human reactions and adaptation to the changing environment. Human beings and their environment are both historical entities that keep changing in biological ways and cultural ways, as well as in the dimension of life. For precisely that reason, how humans act upon the environment is a matter of crucial importance.

Thus, the concept of oneness of life and its environment highlights the subjective role of human beings in the protection of the ecosystem. While human life (as the subject) and the environment are to be grasped as one, humans are impelled to consider the significance of the environment not only for their physical survival, but for their spiritual and cultural existence as well. Human beings are therefore responsible to the environment as protector and perceptive observer by virtue of their wisdom and compassion. We must mobilize all our knowledge and wisdom to restore to viability the earth's ecosystem where it has been destroyed and/or damaged by human acts. For this we will have to apply the best resources that ecological and other branches of science and technology offer.

2. *Buddha Land—A Peaceful World of Humanity*

What does Buddhist teaching say about ways to build a Buddha Land? Essentially, it dwells mainly on human society consisting of bodhisattvas. For purposes of this discussion, the injunction against

killing is of particular relevance, for what it actually represents is a claim to the right to human survival and the right to peace. We have the right to prevent any and all war and to demand arms reduction to make "non-war" a reality.

A passage in the Sutra of Brahma's Net contains a prohibition against possession of any weapons for purposes of killing: "Do not store any swords, bows, axes, or other instruments of warfare." This passage immediately follows the precept against harboring grudges against others. Together, they provide a rationale for the Buddhist determination to build a world without war.

What this demands of us is not just total abolition of nuclear weapons, but the reduction of conventional weapons to a level where aggression is made impossible, or at least highly unfeasible. And, if we honor the Buddhist precept that forbids giving, lending, or selling harmful instruments to others, we are required not to export weapons. To be truly faithful to these Buddhist ideals, we must build a system of human security on a global level, a system that needs no recourse to military might or weapons, and consolidate the system by strengthening its moral and spiritual foundations—compassion, control of desires, and mutual trust among people.

In September 1957 Josei Toda, second president of Soka Gakkai, made an historic declaration urging members of the Youth Division to dedicate themselves to the final and total abolition of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction. "Those who would use nuclear weapons are satanic," he proclaimed, "and we must tear out their devilish claws." Behind his categorical rejection of nuclear weapons, of course, were the Buddhist ideals of the sanctity of life and the right to existence for all living beings.

The "devilish claws" Toda referred to symbolized the devil that is innate in human life. According to the Buddhist view of the world, a most formidable and powerful devil resides in the Sixth Heaven, which is the highest realm in the world of desire. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven is a symbol for the lust for power. T'ien-t'ai translated this view to represent the internal human state, developing it into a theory on human desire. At the top of all desires, including desire for power, prestige, and wealth, T'ien-t'ai listed the Devil, that which delights in controlling the lives of others and manipulating them freely to do his will.

Nichiren fought against the rulers of his time, possessed as they were by the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, and put his own life at risk to do so. Both Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founding president of Soka Gakkai, and his successor, Josei Toda, found the Devil in Japanese militarism during World War II, and condemned it as a force that invaded the lives and violated the rights of people. Both were imprisoned for their uncompromising opposition.

After the war, Toda saw the Devil again insinuated into nuclear weapons, and he sent out clear warning that the power that controlled such weapons could end up annihilating the whole human species. His 1957 declaration censuring atomic and hydrogen bombs was a cry from the heart to act before the earth's ecosystem was destroyed. And it was much more. It sharply reminded us that human beings have the potential to degenerate into devils—humanity can deteriorate until we are no longer human.

My second point on the bodhisattva practice concerns the lifestyle of contentment. This is a lifestyle that necessitates a revolutionary change in the kind of desires one tolerates and nurtures. We are required to turn away from the quest for material and physical satisfaction, and toward spiritual, emotional fulfillment of the self. Hence, as we apply science and technology to utilize natural resources, it is imperative that we take every possible measure to keep our activities in harmony with the ecosystem. More specifically, we must shift the balance in the way our economies work from waste-making to recycling; we must minimize the consumption of resources that are not renewable and maximize dependence on clean, renewable sources of energy like solar and geothermal power.

Third, we have the egalitarianism of the Lotus Sutra's theoretical teaching to draw upon. In Chapter 1 (Introduction) of the sutra, there appear numerous tribes and races of people as well as nonhuman creatures, and they are all treated as equals. The message is unmistakable: equality must encompass all racial and ethnic groups, including, of course, indigenous peoples.

One of the controversial points in the Buddhist concept of equality is the attainment of Buddhahood by the dragon king's eight-year-old daughter through her transformation into a male. Given the idea prevailing at the time that women can never attain that state, the dragon princess's instant attainment of Buddhahood with-

out undergoing eons of austere practices shows the power of the Lotus Sutra to enable all people equally to attain Buddhahood in their present form. In the story, her gender changes simply because the social circumstances of that time and place did not allow a girl to be depicted as attaining Buddhahood without first becoming a male.

Nichiren, however, taught that no one should be the object of discrimination on the basis of gender, and that any woman can attain enlightenment as a woman, just as men can attain enlightenment as men. This was the first time in Buddhist history that genuine equality of the sexes was expounded as right and true.

Fourth, let us consider the idea of eternity as it is conveyed by the concept of the true, eternal Buddha in the essential teaching, which is the second half of the Lotus Sutra. The first ethical principle we can derive from the concept is that future generations must not be sacrificed for the sake of the present generation. To put it another way, we should not seek prosperity and happiness for ourselves at the expense of our offspring. This is a question of intergenerational ethics.

The second principle relates to respect for the spiritual heritage that has been transmitted to us through many generations. The Lotus Sutra describes how, since time immemorial, the eternal Buddha has revealed himself in many different forms in order to save the people of this world. Our ancestors have built a great diversity of cultures, religious beliefs, and customs in the long course of history. We must treasure these as an invaluable spiritual legacy and respect and learn from other people's cultures and customs. Religions, too, are the common reservoir of spirituality for all humankind to share. We must also preserve intact the large number of historic and prehistoric sites, monuments, and relics so that posterity also can benefit by their spiritual power and historical value.

B. Preamble and Concluding Paragraphs

In commenting on the Preamble and the concluding paragraphs of the Earth Charter, I would like to focus on "global civilization" and the United Nations.

In the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra a grand drama is

played out in which the true, eternal Buddha reveals himself. Unfolding before us there is a Buddhist cosmology, which, in modern terms, might be captured in the phrase "creative evolution" of the cosmic life. At the apex of this evolutionary process is human life inhabiting the planet Earth. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, humankind is now developing self-awareness as "members of an interdependent community of life" and an identity as "one humanity and one Earth family."

That global sense of unity will form the spiritual core of a new global civilization, which will bring together the civilizations of East and West, and the diverse cultures of different national and ethnic groups, into peaceful but dynamic harmony. In the terms of Nichiren's Buddhist philosophy, global civilization is born out of the harmonious unity of the Buddha Land and the Treasure Land within the order of Buddhist cosmology.

The new global civilization will accept and encompass great diversity in cultures, science and technology, races and ethnic groups. It will be nourished and strengthened by harmony of matter and spirit, of the inner self and the external world, and of human life as subject and the environment, all united into a dynamic whole.

In the political realm, great expectations are placed on the United Nations and the central role it should play in the new global civilization. The world body provides an international forum for consultation and cooperation among the sovereign states, local governments, and various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Such a forum fully accords with the spirit of conference that Shakyamuni advocated and can be considered a manifestation of the Buddhist law of dependent causation.

The Lotus Sutra describes great assemblies at Eagle Peak and the Ceremony in the Air, to which Shakyamuni summoned the Buddhas, who are his emanations coming from all corners of the universe, and the bodhisattvas, and the masses of people. The bodhisattvas and sentient beings who gathered there to hear Shakyamuni expound his teaching invoke an image of common people. This is the image that prompts us, who follow Nichiren's Buddhist teachings, to demand that the United Nations adjust to the new era and take on a "face of the people" represented by the NGOs and local activists, in addition to the "face of sovereign states."

It should be clear that I fully support the intent and principles of the Earth Charter. In explicating even partially the perspective of Nichiren's Buddhist philosophy, I hope I have been able to provide some ethical, moral, and practical justification to support the assertions presented in the Benchmark Draft. I have also made several points that were not noted in the draft. I hope that the drafting committee will take them into consideration as they draw up the final revision.

A Matter of Great Consequence

by Stephanie Kaza

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The Earth Charter is a call to awaken, a bell ringing out in the big sky—listen! listen! The earth is calling to the people—attend! attend! This is a matter of great consequence—wake up now!

"To study the karma of violence, poverty, and suffering outlined in the Earth Charter is to engage the structural agents which harm many members of the web of life. The Earth Charter is a call for karmic responsibility, for generating awareness around the consequences of individual and corporate actions."

The wake-up call is the heart of Buddhist teaching, the primary motivation for spiritual practice. Many texts from many eras have reiterated the Buddha's basic teaching—wake up! Follow the path to enlightenment! According to the Four Noble Truths, one first must acknowledge the inescapable existence of suffering. The Earth Charter articulates this suffering for the environment and for human relations with the environment, marked strongly now by violence and abuse. Given the pervasive nature of suffering, the human spiritual task is to develop compassion and act out of kindness rather than self-centeredness. The

Earth Charter invites the people of the world to take up this task by protecting and restoring the integrity of this place we call home.

Much of the Earth Charter lines up with traditional Buddhist values and texts. The earliest precepts in the Vinaya, or monk's code, teach proper ways to maintain clean water and air. Later Chinese texts develop the nature of interdependence, lighting the way for the science of ecology, study of relationality. Zen Buddhist sutras encourage direct experience of the natural world—no separation! Yet much is also new in the Charter, for this is a work in progress at the turn of the twenty-first century.

How can Buddhists use this declaration? What value does it contribute for Buddhist practice at this time? There are at least four ways Buddhists around the world can use this Earth Charter for awakening and liberation. The first is to study the nature of the suffering that extends throughout the globe at this time. Buddhists today are called to look deeply at the wide-ranging, large scale effects of the human inclination for greed, hate, and ignorance. Greed for survival leads to hoarding and overuse, not just for the individual level, but also for corporate bodies—nation states, transnational corporations. Hate arises in conflict over resource use—will loggers or hikers win the forests? Will farmers or hydroelectric power take the waters? Ignorance of species and ecosystems excuses a wake of destruction from human activities, unprecedented in scale. Those who aspire to follow the Buddha's way can look not only at how their own actions and the actions of their communities contribute to this suffering, but also at the global implications of these choices. This kind of study is a modern way to practice with the deep, all-pervading First Noble Truth.

Through contacting this suffering, being willing to be present with it, the Buddhist practitioner cultivates deep compassion. This is a second way to work with the Earth Charter. The Charter calls especially for compassionate action on behalf of indigenous people, plants, and animals who have suffered great loss at the hands of unkind people and governments. The Charter urges equal participation by women and young people in developing compassionate practices which can sustain life. This means caring for both what is suffering now and also engaging in practices of compassion for the lives of future generations.

The Fourth Noble Truth offers a way to enlightenment that reorders one's priorities away from self-centeredness and toward service and recognition of others. The Eight-fold Path presents endless opportunities to experience the interconnecting, interdepending nature of the universe. Keeping the Earth Charter as a guide, a follower of the Buddha's way can investigate these paths to find everyday practices which protect the Earth. For example, to choose Right Livelihood would mean committing one's work energy to earth-harmonious activity—restoring damaged rivers, growing organic food, building bluebird boxes. To choose Right Action would mean to scrupulously review one's own actions as well as one's community or nation-state—which actions perpetuate harm? which generate and nourish life? To choose Right Speech would mean to find ways to speak up on behalf of trees and deserts where they are threatened and where they are beloved.

The Earth Charter also can be used in the study of karma, or the law of cause and effect. When one looks deeply into the current global situation, it becomes clear that many seeds of all scales of karma are ripening. These fruits are both wholesome (the grassroots resistance movement, for example) and unwholesome (the rapacious plunder of tropical forests). Individuals in the web of interdependence are choosing consciously or unconsciously how they will live with and affect the Earth. Of perhaps even greater significance are the choices of corporate bodies—universities, government agencies, business, and industry. What is the karma of replacing native forests with massive paper plantations? What actions flow from philosophies of life and nature taught in universities? What are the ecological consequences of transnational corporation labor and resource use practices? To study the karma of violence, poverty, and suffering outlined in the Earth Charter is to engage the structural agents which harm many members of the web of life. The Earth Charter is a call for karmic responsibility, for generating awareness around the consequences of individual and corporate actions.

This draft of the Earth Charter represents the thoughtful reflection of many people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Already many hours of discussion have gone into choosing the wording of each section, and for this I am grateful. These efforts have provided us with a place to begin. Now the wider community

can help shape the final document for nation by nation commitment. So what might still be missing from the Charter? From a Buddhist perspective, I suggest three elements which could strengthen the message of the Charter.

The first of these is a fuller recognition of what is harmful to the Earth. The Charter speaks of the destruction of the diversity of life and the need for precautionary action to prevent harm. These phrases refer to the impact of harmful human *actions*. But Buddhist practice also calls for examining the harm generated by human *speech* and *thought*. The first of the three pure precepts is "Do no harm." Learning to reduce the suffering generated by one's own thoughts, words, and actions is a primary challenge in Buddhist spiritual practice.

The Earth Charter could ennumerate some of the particular thought-forms which commonly justify destruction and violence to the earth community. Dualistic thinking, for example, promotes polarization of issues and enemy-making, thus blocking the way to shared solutions. Treating plants and animals, soil and water as objects for human use (objectification) prevents sympathetic communion with life forms as beings in themselves. Stereotyping of cultures and places overrides the true complexity of each situation, causing mistaken assumptions about what is appropriate. Understanding a system through examining its parts (reductionism) underemphasizes the nature of the relationships between the parts. The ingrained tendency to view the natural world from a human perspective (anthropocentrism) ignores the experiences, needs, and perspectives of all the other 10,000 beings. The list of dangerous views goes on: racism, sexism, classism—these views perpetuate domination of people and rationalize domination of nature. Fanaticism and intolerance too are harmful thought forms which cause violence and block dialogue. The Earth Charter could be explicit in naming the strong connection between thought and action which generates so much of the serious harm to the planet. Then by offering an alternative vision, the Charter helps articulate the paradigm shift in human actions toward the earth.

The second element I suggest is recognition of the need for *restraint*. The five prohibitory precepts (or ten in Mahayana traditions) derive from the first pure precept. Buddhists take vows to

practice restraint from killing, lying, stealing, abusing sexuality, and abusing delusion-causing substances. These are the primary ways in which human thought, speech, and action can generate suffering—not only to one's self and others, but to the earth. Practices of restaint are central to most religious and cultural traditions—from hunting taboos to respect for home territories. It is painfully clear, as the Charter points out, that the Earth is under assault by people's unrestrained actions. Unrestrained consumption by some, unrestrained reproduction by others, unrestrained hoarding of resources by still others. The net effect is more than the system can bear.

Religious traditions, including Buddhism, have much to offer a world disintegrating from human excess. Stories, parables, and commentaries on the precepts carry forward the wisdom of those who have come before us. Their struggles with restraint have yielded priceless insight into the realm of human nature. We can call on the world's religious traditions to offer teachings in restraint for today. The living elders and historic teachers of the past can help people find spiritual practices of restraint so badly needed now. The stability of time-honored teachings is a tremendous gift in a world wrenched with chaos and deterioration.

A third way to strengthen the Charter would be to include application of the Buddhist law of cause and effect. At the root of many environmental crises lies misunderstanding of the full complexity of causes and conditions that have become manifest. A forest is cut down for the lumber in the trees, ignoring the birds and monkeys which depend on the canopy for shelter. A river is dammed, blocking the flow of water across the flood plain. Extreme actions lead to extreme consequences. Add to this the politics involved in exploitation and resistance, and the causes and conditons multiply further. But it is not enough simply to recognize the complexity.

To work with the law of cause and effect means to work with agency and accountability. Not all people are equally responsible for all enviromental problems. To lay blame at the feet of "humankind" blurs important distinctions between those responsible for very different kinds and scales of impact. For example, those involved in weapons production create great human and ecological suffering from civil war, nuclear waste, land mines, and assault guns. Three other top eco-karma agents are the paper and mining indus-

tries as well as the manufacturing of toxic chemicals (for solvents, pesticides, preservatives, lubricants, etc.) And what about those who promote westernization through ads and stereotypes, pushing materialism and high rates of consumption? Big projects like Three Gorges Dam in China or oil fields in Nigeria cause many related effects, one after another, suffering upon suffering.

Without falling into patterns of blaming and enemy-ism, one can still hold others accountable for the consequences of their actions. Without preaching or prescribing one's own environmental dogma, there is still room for pointing out the effects of specific people's specific choices. The Earth Charter can strengthen the call for human responsibility by helping make explicit the range and scale of karmic choices.

The Earth Charter calls for people's best intentions in taking steps to serve all beings. It is a brave and encouraging statement, holding to a vision of a livable future. In its compelling clarity lies the hidden shadow of human imperfection. Each attempt to meet these proclaimed goals will inevitably fall short of what can be envisioned. How do we live with falling short? How do we contain the fears that if we don't act effectively, we may suffer grave consequences? This very impossibility is the poignant place of spiritual practice. The precepts guiding human thought, speech, and action likewise can never be fully met. But it is possible to choose these guidelines as a committed *path*, as a way to face into the wind of complex choices. Sharing this commitment, we can help each other find ways to practice kindness with the Earth, even as we err and stumble in our efforts. The Earth Charter can help the world's peoples become a spiritual community practicing together, each person lighting the way for another.

Will it require an international legal framework to enforce these principles? I'm not sure. The call for a convention to frame environment and development policy may be an extra burden on the Earth Charter principles. There may be many ways to call forth the best earth-loving practices from people and societies around the globe. Why not encourage this creativity to flourish? Legalistic principles offer one mode of enforcing accountability, but they can be limited in dimension and tend to the authoritarian. Many other forms of social reinforcement have evolved from shunning to ceremony to silent witness. I believe the world's religious traditions, including Buddhism, could play a much more active and energized role in promoting environmental ethics. It would seem more congruent to me for the Earth Charter to close with a call to the world's wisdom traditions to take a leadership role in establishing earth ethics principles. Let those who carry the rich inheritance of human spiritual practice come forward and encourage the others by example. Let these voices challenge the religion of the marketplace; let these voices inspire the convocation of celebration and gratitude.

The Earth Charter is a gift to the world, timely and helpful in the frightening rush toward destruction of so many places. Bowing, bowing, head to the earth, body alive, energy moving. In this spirit of gratefulness and also dialogue, the Buddhist community can fully enter into the earth practices offered here. Wake up! Wake up! The earth is calling. Attend! Attend! This is a matter of *great* consequence, worthy of our full attention.

WHAT IS OF VALUE? A BUDDHIST RESPONSE TO THE EARTH CHARTER

by Sallie B. King

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From the outset, it must be said that the very idea of an Earth Charter, and the aspiration it represents, is an excellent thing from a Buddhist perspective. This is so for two primary reasons. First, it is the intention of the authors of the Earth Charter to devise a tool that will help to protect the weak, the threatened, and the already harmed, in both the human and the non-human realms of life. This aspiration is entirely congruent with the most fundamental ethical principle of Buddhism: compassion, caring about the suffering of others, and finding ways to act on that caring by preventing and healing suffering to the best of one's ability.

"Noting that the language of the draft, much like a Buddhist precept, reads, 'we the people of the world commit…,' (i.e., it is not governments that are committing), a Buddhist would like to see the Charter directly invite all people to commit to 'use nonviolent means to prevent and stop war.'"

Second, it is very important from a Buddhist perspective that the Earth Charter is the result of an extensive process of consultation with the intention of finding and articulating a common ethical ground that can be widely affirmed from many cultural perspectives and that will stand for the shared interests of all. For a Buddhist, it is unquestionably good to

practice cooperation and inclusive ways of affirming the wholesome. Previously, we could live largely in ignorance of each other. That possibility is now past. The possibilities before us now are two, both of which we see steadily intensifying: the tendency for humankind to tear itself apart along the well-known fracture lines of separation and difference—race, gender, religion, ethnic group, language, nation, social-economic class; and the tendency to reach across lines of division, to find ways to build bridges, to understand and to cooperate. From a Buddhist point of view, any effort to understand what is not "me" and "mine," any effort to uproot the fear and hatred attached to "them," any effort to join together for the common good is an expression of the deepest values of Buddhism: to overcome ignorant views of "self" and the fear and hatred that accompany them and to replace them with understanding, friendliness, and compassion. Clearly, the aspiration behind the Earth Charter and the praxis of its coming into being are both deeply congruent with Buddhist values.

Turning to an evaluation of the content of the Earth Charter, three categories of comment may be made. (1) It can be affirmed very strongly that there is profound agreement from the Buddhist side with the deep values expressed in the Earth Charter draft. (2) However, a Buddhist would be likely to want to supplement the draft or to strengthen it on several points. (3) Finally, there are several passages in which the particular language used is problematic from a Buddhist point of view. This language requires careful consideration.

(1) There is no question that Buddhists embrace the deep values expressed in the Earth Charter draft. Specifically, these shared, deep values include: the view of the world as a community of interdependence; the emphasis upon the necessity of sharing and equity; the affirmation of non-violence; the concern to prevent suffering; the repudiation of a perspective that measures the value of others by their instrumental value for oneself or one's kind; the affirmation of the necessity of restraint of self-aggrandizement for the common good; and the affirmation, implicit throughout the text and finally explicit at its end, that "our best actions will embody the integration of knowledge with compassion." All this is the very life-

blood of Buddhism: it is the simple truth, the simple sanity that can be seen when a domineering individual or collective ego is removed from the picture. Examine them: *anatman* speaks in every one of these affirmations.[1]

(2) All is well, then, with the fundamental aspiration and content of the Earth Charter. However, a Buddhist would be likely to want to supplement the draft or to strengthen it on several points. These are as follows.

(a) The draft states, "We the peoples of the world commit ourselves to…[#7] practice non-violence, recognizing that peace is the wholeness created by harmonious and balanced relationships with oneself, other persons, other life forms, and Earth." This is very fine, from a Buddhist perspective, as far as it goes, but a Buddhist would want to strengthen the statement, if possible, with more explicit acknowledgment of the devastating effects of warfare and the necessity of avoiding the same. In addition to directly causing huge numbers of human deaths, modern warfare does enormous damage to animals, plants, and eco-systems and vastly exacerbates already existing rifts in the human community. By devastating human community, it plants karmic seeds that will bring further destruction in the future. Noting that the language of the draft, much like a Buddhist precept, reads, "we the people of the world commit…," (i.e., it is not governments that are committing), a Buddhist would like to see the Charter directly invite all people to commit to "use nonviolent means to prevent and stop war."

Furthermore, it might be wise to add a statement such as: "When, despite preventative efforts, war breaks out, actions that cause lasting damage to the Earth and/or its species—use of landmines, chemical or nuclear warfare, defoliation, poisoning of the Earth, the destruction of natural resources, etc.—shall be regarded as international crimes."

(b) Buddhists would overwhelmingly want to join with Dr. Jay McDaniel in his appeal to have added to the Charter a statement calling for protection of individual animals (not just species), such as the language he proposes: "People should treat animals decently, and protect them from cruelty, avoidable suffering, and unnecessary killing." This is an ancient and deep Buddhist value. There should be no hesitation from any Buddhist on this point.

(c) Given that there is a good deal of struggle to attain religious freedom in the Buddhist world at present, Buddhists would likely want to see somewhere in the Charter, perhaps in a strengthened principle 14, a statement that would "ensure that people throughout their lives have opportunities to acquire religious knowledge and freely practice religion."

(d) With respect to the statements on human population and reproduction (#3 and #11), Buddhists would likely be prepared to support a stronger statement on the necessity of stopping, or even reversing, human population growth, such as: "Mindful of the carrying capacity of the Earth and of our obligation to share the Earth with other species, we commit to restrain human fecundity."

(e) Finally, while there are statements that point in this direction (#4, #5, #6), nowhere in the Charter is there the straightforward statement, "we commit to eliminate hunger among humankind." This can be done and should be a statement of clear commitment in the Charter.

(3) Let us turn now to the several passages in which the particular language used is problematic from a Buddhist point of view. First, a passage that seems problematic from any point of view, #16: "Do not do to the environment of others what you do not want done to your environment." Sadly, it is the case that many, many people befoul or poison their own environment—what else can we call it when a company dumps poison into a waterway or the air, or stripmines the land, or when a nation is so eager to rapidly industrialize that no limits are placed on what is done to the environment? Tragically, we are a species so intent on short-term and narrowly-defined benefit or profit that we ignore even our own long-term or more broadly-defined benefit before we even get to any question of the benefit or loss of others. An effort to use Golden Rule language pops up repeatedly in international documents of this kind, but it simply won't work for environmental protection, given that we notoriously foul our own nests.

Turning now to specifically Buddhist concerns, there is the question of whether a family of language should be used that states that we "share a reverence for life," or that "Earth, each life form, and all living beings possess intrinsic value," or that life is "sacred." (The latter term is not used in the Charter, but it is debated whether it

should be; the other two expressions are used.) These expressions do pose problems for a Buddhist.

First, use of the term "sacred" would be the least acceptable in the above list to a Buddhist; it could pose a real obstacle and it is good that the framers of the draft have avoided it. As Webster points out, the first meaning of the term is "consecrated to or belonging to a god or deity." This clearly will not do.

Second, the phrase "reverence for life" calls for a more nuanced response. While East Asian Buddhists do have a strong sense of reverence for life, this attitude comes into Buddhism primarily from elements in East Asian culture external to Buddhism, especially Taoism and Shinto. Many centuries ago this sense of reverence for the natural world fused itself into the East Asian Buddhist tradition such that it became an inseparable part. It is much less clear whether Theravada Buddhists have such a sense of reverence; respect, yes, as well as humility and appreciation, all based on an awareness of one's own very small place in the great web of interdependence, but reverence, no. Thus while this term does not evoke as negative a response as does the term "sacred," it does not speak for all Buddhists.

Finally, we must consider the philosophically interesting question whether a Buddhist can affirm that Nature or "Earth, each life form, and all living beings" possesses intrinsic value. Many outcomes of this discussion are possible, depending upon which aspect of the issue one emphasizes and which branch of Buddhist thought one consults. First, we should recognize that the framers of the Charter see this language as critical; to quote Steven Rockefeller,

> The importance of the appearance in international legal documents of the assertion that all species have intrinsic value cannot be overstated. It is a major breakthrough—a move beyond the traditional anthropocentric worldview that has dominated Western culture and much of the rest of the world in recent centuries.[2]

To a Buddhist, what is most striking and useful about this move towards language of intrinsic value is that it is simultaneously a move away from language of instrumental value. It is a way, using Western conceptual language, of taking the human down from the pinnacle, and placing humans where we belong, in the tangled web

of interdependence. Buddhists will applaud the effort and the intent to turn—in legal documents, in ethical thinking, and in life—away from a stance that conceives and measures the value of non-human beings only in instrumental terms, in terms of what those beings can do for us, humans. There is no justification for, and much to be said against, a measurement of non-humans in instrumental terms in Buddhism. The very idea that animals and plants only have instrumental value, only value "for us," is from the Buddhist perspective nothing but an expression of the inflation, distortion, and self-aggrandizement of the human ego (a syndrome, of course, that is near universal, not Western). Nothing but tragic results, certainly including the destruction of the environment and vast harm to non-human beings, could be expected from such a view. From a Buddhist point of view it is essential to do everything possible to dismantle such a view and replace it with one in which humans are a part of the web.

Parenthetically, the fact that Buddhist texts frequently state that a human birth is the best form of birth does not threaten this point. A human birth is the best in the sense that it affords the opportunity to practice religious discipline and achieve enlightenment. However, this does not place humans at the top of the pinnacle in the way we have just discussed because of the fact that the value of a human life *is* only greatest when a human is moving towards greater selflessness and directly away from self-aggrandizement. This, of course, completely undercuts the possibility of regarding oneself as superior. In addition, of course, many, perhaps most, Buddhists believe that sentient beings live countless lives, sometimes in a human birth, sometimes in an animal birth, and sometimes in other forms. Clearly, given this view, there can be no absolute line drawn between the human and the non-human life.

Buddhists, then, have no problem at all with the intention of this language of intrinsic value. Is there a problem, though, for Buddhists, in the language of intrinsic value itself? For a thing to have intrinsic value means that it is regarded as being of value in and of itself, not for the sake of the value it represents to another; it is an end in itself and not just a means. This does pose problems from a Buddhist perspective.[3]

When attempting to speak of Buddhism's worldview in general,

it is best to speak in terms of interdependence, since that is a concept that all Buddhists accept and that is foundational to other concepts that developed later. Given the perspective of interdependence, one cannot say that any thing exists in and of itself; no thing can be an end in itself, no thing can be said to have value in itself, because there is no "in itself." All things are interdependent moments in process; they are not stopping points and they are not independent. For this reason, language of intrinsic value does not come naturally to a Buddhist mouth.[4]

But let us take another look. In the work of the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, we find ideas that enable us to see this matter in a different light.[5] For Buddhadasa everything is Dhamma *(Dharma)* and,

> Dhamma means Nature, which can be distinguished in four aspects: Nature itself..., the Law of Nature..., the Duty of living things according to Natural Law..., and the results that follow from performing duty according to Natural Law...All four are known by the single word 'Dhamma.'[6]

Thus Dhamma is Nature, and Nature is all things. As Santikaro Bhikkhu elaborates,

> Nature is the sum total of reality; there is no thing that is not Nature...Everything is produced out of Nature by the law of Nature [i.e., interdependence]. Nature and humanity are not separate; human beings and all their creations are as much a part of Nature as are insects, trees, rivers, and stars. Thus, in Ajarn Buddhadasa's understanding, we are not set against or above Nature but are only a part of Nature that must find and fulfill its natural role or duty (Dhamma).[7]

Buddhadasa's conception of morality *(siladhamma)* gives us the last piece of the puzzle. Santikaro writes, with quotations from Buddhadasa,

> Ajarn Buddhadasa defined *siladhamma*...as "1. the condition of being normal, 2. the Dhamma that causes normality, and 3. the thing that is normality (itself)." The key term here is normality *(pakati)*, which the Pali Text Society dictionary defines as "original or natural form, natural state or condition"...The true nor-

mality of *'pakati'* must be natural, that is, derived from the law of Nature rather than thought. "*Sila* means '*pakati*.' If anything leads to *pakati* and not to disorder, it is called '*sila*.' The Dhamma that brings this state about is called '*sila-dhamma*.'"[8]

Let us apply this to our consideration of whether Nature possesses "intrinsic value." In the Buddhist perspective as articulated by Buddhadasa, it is Nature that establishes and, by establishing, defines normality. It is up to us, as humans, to *fit in* with what is normal, Nature or Dhamma. Thus it is Nature that determines, and karmically judges, whether we individual humans are natural or good, i.e., whether we fit in with Nature, the law of which is interdependence. Thus we humans are in no position to judge whether Nature is good or possesses intrinsic value or goodness. The reality of goodness is produced by Nature; it is naturalness. Our human conception of goodness, if it is to be accurate, must derive *from* nature. That is to say, there is a Natural Law, interdependence, which is manifest in and which *is* Nature, of which we are a part. Our goodness, or lack thereof, is defined by the extent to which we live in harmony with that Natural Law.

This, I think, is the deeper source of Buddhist disquiet with the language of intrinsic value. From a Buddhist perspective, to recognize in Nature intrinsic value is clearly a vast improvement over an attitude which sees in Nature only instrumental value. The problem with intrinsic value is that it does not go far enough. The Buddhist view of Nature and of goodness is a step beyond intrinsic value on the same trajectory that points away from instrumental value. That is, seeing in Nature only instrumental value is utterly egocentric; seeing intrinsic value in Nature is much less egocentric, but to the extent that it leaves the human ego as the arbiter or judge of what has even intrinsic value it is still far more egocentric that the Buddhist perspective which largely maintains silence on the subject and recognizes that it is Nature which is the arbiter and judge of whether or not *we* are good.

What does this mean for the Buddhist response to the Earth Charter's use of language of intrinsic value? A Buddhist would not spontaneously express him- or herself in language of intrinsic value. Yet, knowing what this language means to others, recognizing that

it represents a move away from the egoism of instrumental value, recognizing that this is an expression of intent on the part of the human community to respect and care for the Earth and its beings with no consideration of their usefulness "for us," a Buddhist could enthusiastically applaud when another speaks in this way. Moreover, Buddhists are pragmatic. Buddhist philosophers know very well that the majority of the world thinks in terms quite different from theirs. They also recognize that words are only tools, means to an end. If it is necessary at this point in time for the global community to express its aspiration to care for the Earth and its beings by using the term "intrinsic value"; if, by directly negating the dominance of the concept of instrumental value, the use of language of intrinsic value performs a function that no other language can perform, then, from a Buddhist perspective, by all means use that language and expect Buddhist support. Just don't expect Buddhists to speak this way themselves.

In sum, Buddhists will applaud the Earth Charter, its aspiration, and the friendly inclusiveness of its posture. They will deeply appreciate its stance as a voice of compassion attempting to protect the weak from the ravages of the marauding collective human ego. They will hope to see the Charter strengthened in this work, if a way can be found that is acceptable to the global community. And while they might have reservations about the forms of certain expressions, they will pragmatically embrace as skillful means the language that expresses the best that the global community can say at this time.

Notes

1. It is worth noting that the Earth Charter understands life in terms of interdependence. The same is true of the Global Ethic, another document that went to great lengths to find an ethical common ground and a form of language that could be embraced by the greatest possible diversity of cultures. Language of interdependence, thus, seems to be a form of language that is both confirmed by modern science and inoffensive to the diversity of cultures and religions. As such at present it is playing a crucial role in the articulation of international agreements. It will be interesting to observe whether this continues to be the case.

2. "Buddhism, Global Ethics, and the Earth Charter," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

3. Steven Rockefeller reports other Buddhist philosophers voicing similar qualms; ibid.

4. Steven Rockefeller suggests that Buddhists consider Buddha nature as a concept wherein one might find a source for speaking of intrinsic value. This indeed might work, but it would exclude both those Buddhists who do not accept Buddha nature at all and those Buddhists who do not accept the broad construal of the concept that would be required to apply it to nature.

5. Granted that Buddhadasa is a very progressive thinker by Theravada standards, I nevertheless suspect that he has articulated what many Theravada Buddhist have long unconsciously felt on this subject.

6. Quoted and translated by Santikaro Bhikku in "Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Life and Society Through the Natural Eyes of Voidness," in Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 159.

7. Ibid., p. 160.

8. Ibid., p. 171.

"Rights" Because of Intrinsic Nature or "Responsibilities" Because of Mutual Interdependence?

by Donald K. Swearer

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Whether the natural and animal realms have rights has been one of the central philosophical and religious questions in current debates about the environment. Buddhism has not been exempt from this debate. Some have argued that the concepts of Not-self *(anātman)* and Emptiness *(śunyatā)* undermine a sense of intrinsic nature and are not compatible with the language of "rights," whether referring to humans, animals, or nature. They also contend that Buddhism's emphasis on truth overshadows an ethics of rights and principles. Others contend that the Buddhist critique of inherent self-nature coupled with an emphasis on compassion *(karunā)* provides a unique basis for an ethic of responsibility based on a distinctive sense of intrinsic mutual worth.

Whether or not Buddhism supports an environmental ethic, in general, and the Earth Charter, in particular, depends not only on

"The debate over whether Buddhism's apparent deconstruction of intrinsic nature undermines the language of the rights of nature is a question that 'tends not to edification,' especially in the light of the urgent call to concrete action that should be the imperative of the Earth Charter."

what texts one reads but how one reads them. Underlying this essay is my belief that Buddhism's contribution to the proposed Earth Charter lies more in the area of reponsibilities rather than rights and that the rights/responsibilities dichotomy is problematic and tends not to edification. Essential to these two points is my conviction that the heart of the Buddha's *dharma* is spiritual transformation ("I came to teach the cause of suffering and the way to its cessation."), and that spiritual transformation underlies all of our attitudes and actions toward the human, animal, and natural environments. Consequently, while the Buddha's victory over ignorance, hatred, and greed was prerequisite to his enlightenment *(Nirvāṇa)*, it was equally necessary to his apperception of the universal principle of nature or interdependent co-arising. It is a truism, furthermore, that the Buddhist path—perceived as a way of life—begins with right understanding *(sammādiṭṭhi)*, and that right understanding means the universality of the interdependent and co-arising nature of all things.

The Buddha's enlightenment experience occurred over the duration of the three watches of one night. During the first watch he reviewed his karmic history, remembering systematically all of his previous lives; during the second watch he used the supernatural power of his divine eye to survey the entire world and all the beings in it as they were dying out of and being reborn into the various realms of rebirth; and, in the final watch of the night he fathomed the truth of interdependent co-arising. This account traces the Buddha's enlightment from the particular to the universal, from the interconnectedness of his personal karmic history, to the karmic history of humankind, to the universal principle underlying the cause and cessation of suffering, i.e. *paṭicca samuppāda*. Subsequently, this principle is further generalized as a universal law of causality *(idappaccayatā)*—"on the arising of this, that arises; on the cessation of this, that ceases." In the broadest sense, the Buddhist law of conditionality is much more than a paradigm of the cause and cessation of human suffering. As a causal principle, it includes all life forms both human and nonhuman. The Buddhist Wheel of Becoming *(bhāvacakka)* schematizes not only the causes of suffering *(dukkha)* and its cessation. It also offers a picture of a holistic cosmology bound together in a web of moral reciprocity.

In the human realm this morally reciprocal universe is spelled out in terms of mutual responsibilities among different social groups in the Buddha's advice to the lad, Sigāla *(Sigālaka Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, 31). The *Jātaka* narratives broaden the idiom of moral responsibility to include interactions among the human, animal, and natural realms. Humans, for example, are admonished to protect trees: "The tree that gives you pleasant shade/ To sit or lie at need, you should not tear/Its branches down, a cruel wanton deed."

The Buddha's first teaching following his enlightenment sets forth the Four Noble Truths (suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation) and the Eightfold Noble Path. A striking feature of the Eightfold Noble Path is the necessary interrelationship between worldview and practice. While this teaching appears to give primacy to Right View *(sammādiṭṭhi)*, the first stage of the path, the subsequent stages demonstrate that the Buddhist worldview is but prerequisite to its embodiment in intention, word, and deed and, furthermore, that a deep comprehension of the causally conditioned nature of all things requires mindfulness *(sammāsati)* and focused meditation *(sammāsamādhi)*, not merely intellectual cognition.

The above observations are intended to suggest that Buddhism has the following contributions to make to a discussion of the Earth Charter: (1) that the universal Buddhist principle of causality is compatible with the universalism of the Earth Charter, but that from the perspective of the *Buddhadharma*, principles should be grounded in concrete knowledge of particular cases, in particular, self-knowledge; (2) that the principles of the Earth Charter are meaningless unless they are actualized in behavior; (3) that the debate over whether Buddhism's apparent deconstruction of intrinsic nature undermines the language of the rights of nature is a question that "tends not to edification," especially in the light of the urgent call to concrete action that should be the imperative of the Earth Charter; (4) that ultimately, the problems addressed by the Earth Charter are spiritual in nature calling for a profound transformation of personal, communal, and global values. It is also self-evident that, at least in an ideal sense, the Buddha and the *saṅgha* stand as examples of peace, simplicity, and nonviolence, preeminent values uplifted in the Earth Charter.

I propose to conclude these brief comments by citing two *Suttas* from the Pāli canon of Theravāda Buddhism. My purpose in doing so is twofold: first, to emphasize the value of stories in our search for the principles of a universal environmental ethic, for stories are often more compelling than principles no matter how praiseworthy they may be; and, second, to illustrate the point that in the Buddhist tradition the natural environment *per se* is a necessary condition for both the realization of individual human fulfillment (i.e. Nirvāṇa) and the maintenance of a community of mutual regard.

i.

In the Sutta on the Noble Search (*Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, 26), the Buddha describes his own quest for enlightenment (Nirvāṇa). In his search for the "supreme state of sublime peace" he became a student of the noted religious teacher, Ālāra Kālāma. He soon mastered Ālāra's teaching but found that it did not lead to dispassion, peace, and the direct knowledge of enlightenment, so he turned to another famous spiritual leader of the day, Uddaka Rāmaputta. The future Buddha was such an adept pupil that Uddaka invited him to lead his community. Although Uddaka's teaching took the future Buddha to a sublime state of consciousness beyond neither-perception-nor-non-perception, it fell short of Nirvāṇa. So, the future Buddha continued his search for the good: "Seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages through the Magadhan country until eventually I arrived at the Senānigama near Uruvelā. *There I saw a delightful stretch of land and a lovely woodland grove, and a clear flowing river with a delightful forest so I sat down there thinking, 'Indeed, this is an appropriate place to strive for the ultimate realization of that unborn supreme security from bondage, Nirvāṇa.'"* According to the Sutta of The Noble Search, such a natural setting was a necessary condition for the relinquishing of attachment, the destruction of craving, and the attainment of the state of equanimity and dispassion requisite for the future Buddha to perceive the truth of the interdependent, coarising nature of things.

ii.

In the Sutta on the Monuments to the Dhamma (*Dhammacetiya Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, 89), King Pasenadi of Kosala visits his pleasure gardens in his state carriage. Reaching a point where the road is no longer passable, he dismounts from his carriage and continues on foot. There he sees "roots of trees that were lovely and inspiring, quiet and undisturbed by voices, with an atmosphere of seclusion, remote from people, favourable for retreat. The sight of these reminded him of the Blessed One [the Buddha] thus: 'These roots of trees are lovely and inspiring, quiet and undisturbed by voices, with an atmosphere of seclusion, remote from people, favourable for retreat, like the places where we used to pay respect to the Blessed One.'" The king, reminded of the Buddha and his followers, then has the state carriages prepared for a trip to the Sakyan town of Medaḷumpa where the Blessed One and his disciples are "practicing the good way." After reaching Medaḷumpa and paying his respects to the Buddha, the Blessed One asks the king the reason for his visit. The king replies that he came to honor the Buddha and his followers because no one else embodies the holy life lived as perfectly and purely. Unlike kings, nobles, brahmins, householders, families, friends, and recluses, the *bhikkhus* live in concord and mutual appreciation without disputation. They are well disciplined, "smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with mind as aloof as a wild deer's." King Pasenadi's laudatory appreciation of the community of Buddhist monks connects the peace and harmony of its disciplined interdependence with a *natural setting of lovely and inspiring trees, undisturbed by people, an atmosphere of seclusion, favourable for retreat.*

It may be moot whether these stories attribute to nature a *sui generis* character, but they can be read as uplifting the necessity of nature for itself, not in isolation but as a requisite for being fully human and for sustaining a community of simplicity, nonviolence, and harmony.