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A Buddhist Perspective on the Global Environmental Crisis: Poetics of the Wild

Cynthia D. Trone

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A Buddhist Perspective on the Global Environmental Crisis:

Poetics of the Wild

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February, 2018

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Abstract

My thesis is about a Buddhist perspective on the global environmental crisis, including an exploration of how both ancient and modern poetry express a compassionate response to nature, a social science survey, and a creative project of my own poetry. The exploration in the rationale paper suggests that looking inward may be an important way to begin to understand individual responsibility for the global environmental crisis. In consideration of this is a discussion of ancient Buddhist wisdom and teachings about, and the relevance of, mindfulness, compassion, interdependence, and impermanence. In a creative extension of this discussion, an exploration of Buddhist-inspired nature poetry follows. Both ancient and modern poetics address the human condition and interconnection with the planet in deep, heartfelt and insightful ways. I call this *Poetics of the Wild*, to describe the vast, passionate art of language that captures the wildness of nature, as well as the wildness of the creative mind in expressing our connection to it. In my emergent and multidimensional vision for this project, I include my research survey on how mindfulness may be a factor in individuals' actions with regard to global warming; the findings are presented to illustrate the importance of mindful behavior within the context of creating solutions to the environmental crisis. Finally, my own poetry is presented in a creative project, with deep compassion and love for the earth. Awareness and respect of nature sustains my own mindfulness of how to live within the context of the devastating global environmental crisis, and I hope that it inspires others to pay close attention to the world around them, as well as to each other.

Keywords: mindfulness, global warming, poetry, environment, climate change, Buddhism, compassion, nature, interdependence, impermanence, sustainability, consumption

POETICS OF THE WILD

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A Buddhist perspective on the global environmental crisis:

Poetics of the wild

The ancient wisdom of the Buddha contains valuable insight which could shed light on personal and social engagement with regard to the health of the planet and human flourishing. Humanity is facing a global environmental crisis which threatens the survival of the planet and all sentient beings (Hawken, 2017). It is with a sense of hope that my exploration of the Dharma reveals universal truths which may help to understand the potential of human nature, even in light of the disastrous effects of modern behavior on the planet. The Buddhist wisdom of mindfulness, compassion, interdependence and impermanence can guide us as we navigate this unprecedented era of human and environmental suffering. Positive change and individual engagement are urgent and essential as we look inward for answers.

Andrew Olendzki, Buddhist scholar and teacher, writes of the Buddha's Sunakkhata Sutta as a way to understand the temptation of continuing down this dangerous path of consumption and environmental destruction. He writes of our modern and deluded reliance on precious and disappearing resources, with a comparison to the Buddha's teaching of craving and restraint. He writes, "Perhaps when we pause to catch our breath, between gulps of sweet poison, we may glimpse the peril into which we are willfully placing ourselves and choose a wiser course" (2017, p. 30). Understanding a Buddhist perspective offers the wisdom to be mindfully aware of our actions, and to realize a new way of being that is sustainable and healing to the suffering planet.

This paper will begin with a discussion of some of Buddhism's ancient suttas that focus on nature, followed by relevant teachings and studies of mindfulness, compassion, interdependence and impermanence as auspicious modern responses to global warming. The exploration of

Poetics of the Wild then reveals insight into creative expression of the deep connection that exists between nature and human beings. Through the language of Buddhist-inspired nature poetry, both ancient and modern, we hear the cry of the earth (Vaughan-Lee, 2016). To more deeply understand how environmental mindfulness may be applied to individual responsibility for the global crisis, I include a research survey that I conducted with a limited population of primarily educated, American consumers. The results are relevant in further exploration of the importance of awareness and mindfulness in modern daily life as we face the unprecedented challenges of global warming.

Through my examination of Buddhist wisdom, poetics, and mindfulness, we can begin to appreciate the precious value of living in the “self-disciplined elegance of the wild mind” (Snyder, 1995, p. vii) as our interconnection with, and understanding of, nature becomes increasingly critical. The urgency of finding compassionate ways to begin to solve the overwhelming crisis of global warming begins with each of us looking within to understand mindful responsibility in finding solutions to shift the destruction of the earth. The culmination of the rationale paper builds the foundation for my creative project which highlights my own poetry, expressing my compassionate invitation to embrace the exquisite and fragile landscape of our planet while engaging in responsibility for its survival.

A Buddhist Perspective on Global Warming

In learning how a Buddhist perspective could help our current environmental crises, it is often the words of Zen master and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh that offer deeply clear and purposeful insight. Here he calls for Buddhists to listen to the “bells of mindfulness”:

Buddhism is the strongest form of humanism we have. It can help us learn to

live with responsibility, compassion and loving-kindness. Every Buddhist practitioner should be a protector of the environment. We have the power to decide the destiny of the planet. If we awaken to our true situation, there will be a change in our collective consciousness. We have to do something to wake people up. We have to help the Buddha to wake up the people who are living in a dream. (2008, p. 265)

Framed with the wisdom of Buddhist practitioners, poets, and scholars, this discussion will explore how this Buddhist perspective resonates, while offering hope and comfort in a time of global crisis. Beginning with an overview of the Buddha's teachings that include a focus on nature, and the relevance of those teachings with regard to the modern environmental crisis, I will then explore four tenets of Buddhism that could have profound impact on modern behavior: mindfulness (specifically environmental mindfulness, with a discussion of the benefits of meditation as it relates to sustainable behavior), compassion, interdependence, and impermanence. Gary Snyder, Buddhist poet and environmental advocate, embraces the ethics of a Buddhist perspective to ecological concerns:

Buddhism teaches impermanence, suffering, compassion, and wisdom. Buddhist teachings go on to say that the true source of compassion and ethical behavior is paradoxically none other than one's own realization of the insubstantial and ephemeral nature of everything. (1995, p. 246)

Through a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings, perhaps there will be revealed universal truths to help guide a positive shift in contemporary environmental consciousness. *Poetics of the*

Wild follows, with respect for the deep connection to nature that is most clearly expressed through Buddhist poetry, both ancient and modern.

Buddha's Teachings on Nature

Although the Buddha's teachings did not directly focus on the preservation of nature, it is through an understanding of deep awakening and liberation from suffering that one can find sources of wisdom to benefit the modern world. Akuppa, a contemporary Buddhist scholar and teacher, writes, "What Buddhism and environmentalism share is a desire to end suffering" (2009, p. 10). The Aggañña-Suttanta, the Lotus Sutra, and the teachings on Gaia, mindfulness, compassion, interdependence and impermanence are all powerful examples of ancient Buddhist wisdom which are relevant today in bringing balance and change, in harmony with the earth.

In the ancient Buddhist suttas, it is the Aggañña-Suttanta, the book of genesis, that speaks to the issues of greed and suffering with regard to nature. The Buddha ("the Exalted One"), speaks to a young man named Vasettha about the evil customs that appeared among men as hoarding and greed became apparent in discovering the bounty of the earth. "We, enjoying the savory earth, feeding on it, nourished by it, continued so for a long while. But since evil and immoral customs became rife among us, the savory earth disappeared" (DN 27). This loss of the pure, luminous radiance of man is described in the sutta as moral degradation with detrimental effects on the natural world (De Silva, 1987). This manifestation of greed creates a lack of abundance of crops, and an evolutionary lesson. Lily DeSilva writes, "Buddhism believes that though change is a factor inherent in nature, human moral deterioration accelerates the process of change and brings about changes which are adverse to human well-being and happiness" (p. 93).

In the clarity of the Buddha's teaching, it is human beings' laziness and greed that are at the heart of the ongoing destruction of a healthy environment.

The Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana scripture, was spoken in verse; in it, the teaching of the Dharma is compared to rain, equally available and accessible to all sentient beings.

I rain down the Dharma rain,
filling the whole world,
and this single-flavored Dharma
is practiced by each according to the individual's power.
It is like those thickets and groves,
medicinal herbs and trees
which, according to whether they are large or small,
bit by bit grow lush and beautiful. (trans., Watson, 2000, p. 48)

This teaching is rooted in profound universal relevance for the human condition, and the interconnectedness of all living beings, including the earth itself. As the Lotus Sutra describes, the teachings of the Buddha apply to all beings, and the practice of the Dharma is offered as a relief from suffering to all individuals on the planet. As humankind goes forth into an unprecedented era of ecological challenges, ancient wisdom may be called upon to understand deep truths of human suffering which may bring valuable new insight to compassionate change.

Many of the stories told about the Buddha are located in nature, often in forests, among the trees and lush grass. Throughout the Lotus Sutra and early teachings of the Buddha, descriptions of nature are often intertwined with human experience. This natural interconnection creates

the basis for possibilities in understanding human beings' responsibility within an interdependent universe, as is illustrated in the following description of one the Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha encouraged acting with compassion and respect for the trees, noting that they provide natural protection for the beings who dwell in the forest. On one occasion, the Buddha admonished some travelers who, after resting under a large banyan tree, proceeded to cut it down. Much like a friend, the tree had given them shade. To harm a friend is indeed an act of ingratitude. (Kabilsingh, 1990, p. 9)

In these early lessons of compassion, there is a timeless respect and value for nature that can be appreciated as possibilities for heightened awareness for our inherent responsibility for the natural world.

Dogen, a 13th century Japanese Zen Buddhist master, often used references and connections to nature in his teachings. "The pure suchness of earth, space and time serves as a matrix for practice and for further expressions of awakening...The world view of space and earth, and of time, expressed in Dogen's use of the Lotus Sutra may serve as a platform for clarifying twenty-first century approaches to understanding Bodhisattva awareness and praxis" (Leighton, 2007, p. 119). The symbol of the lotus flower blooming in, and despite, the mud, is part of ancient Dogen teachings which indicate the resilient fertility of the earth in spite of the "karmic obstructions" (p. 105). The image of a fuchsia lotus in bloom in the midst of a devastating amount of trash in barren mud which I witnessed in rural India earlier this year, inspired one of my poems in the series for *Poetics of the Wild*. "No mud, no lotus" is often repeated by Thich Nhat Hanh, and other Buddhist teachers, to illustrate, metaphorically, the patience and transformation of suf-

fering in moving through the muck into awakening. In the midst of widespread ecological devastation, there remains the resilience of nature and the human spirit.

The concept of a Bodhisattva (a living being who helps all beings awaken in the spirit of enlightenment), could be translated in modern times to embody caring individuals who spread deep compassion to all beings, including the planet. As described by Taigen Dan Leighton, a professor, translator and Zen priest, the Sanskrit word, *bodhi*, describes the state of being awake, and the word *sattva* can be translated to mean mind, intention, a sentient being, or a sense of strength or courage. “Thus, the bodhisattva has sometimes been associated with warrior strength and courage and with the heroic aspect of dedication to awakening” (2007, p. vi). Zen Buddhist scholar and environmental advocate, David Loy, describes the power of the bodhisattva in light of climate activism:

Instead of asking, “What can I get out of this situation?” the bodhisattva asks, “What can I contribute to make this situation better?” Today we can understand the bodhisattva path as a spiritual archetype that offers a new vision of human possibility. (2015, p. 34)

With dedicated mindfulness practice, anyone can rise to act as a bodhisattva. In this case, one could share an enlightened and inspired courage to care for nourishing impeccable attention to the healing of the earth.

The ancient goddess Gaia is a symbol of the earth in both Greek and Buddhist teachings; Gaia embraces the importance of the feminine perspective as a model for the connection of humanity and nature. Although modern conversations may lay blame on Mother Earth (also a feminine image) for reacting with anger in recent displays of flooding, fires and storms, the Buddhist

perspective illuminates us that it is human interdependence with nature that is at the root of the causes and conditions that are unfolding. Spiritual activist, eco-philosopher and Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy writes of the hopeful, feminine light in the Buddha's teachings for this dark time:

Such is the wisdom of the Mother of all Buddhas, empty of preconception, the pregnant point of potential action, beholding the teeming world with a vision that transfigures. When she is later portrayed as Green Tara, her gestures will recall this active, compassionate aspect; for the right arm is outstretched to help, and the right leg, no longer tucked up in the aloof serenity of the lotus posture, extends downward, ready to step into the world. (2007, p. 69)

Macy outlines the potential awakening that could occur through ancient teachings, and the positive changes that could follow. The Gaia theory, "showing our planet to be a living system and our larger body" (p. 146) along with an awakened presence of mind that could free us from a cycle of suffering, are all reflected in early Buddhist teachings. The transformative vision of the world contained in the Buddha's teachings offer healing and hope, with gentleness and compassion, to our threatened existence.

Environmental Mindfulness

Meditation, as a practice that is true to the Buddha's teachings, brings a nonjudgmental awareness to the present moment that could bring mindful solutions to adapting behavior and attitudes toward climate change. Throughout my research on the connections between Buddhism, the environment, and global warming, it is mindfulness that appears to be an important aspect to solutions in finding individual engagement and responsibility for global warming. In many recent publications, there is a varying degree of assurance that meditation is impacting modern cul-

ture; although Jon Kabat-Zinn writes, “it’s too early to tell” (2017, p. 1133). The number of mindfulness publications has soared from just one in 1982, to more than 650 in 2016 (Kabat-Zinn, 2017). In this new field of research and mainstream interest, there are indications that mindfulness-based behavioral training may lead to positive changes for the global warming crisis (Barrett et al, 2016).

One of the benefits of the stillness of meditation is a calm abiding awareness from which mindful, sustainable behavior can thrive. EcoDharma leader, Rob Burbea, shares this example of how paying close attention in daily life can provide moments of clarity for changing behavior:

One can reflect, for instance, on what was involved in making the paper on which you are reading these words: the trees from which the paper pulp came, the rain that watered those trees, the clouds that released those rains, the ocean waters that evaporated to form those clouds, the sun that warmed the waters to the point of evaporation; the workers on the plantation and at the factory that produced the paper, the food that sustained them and gave them energy, the natural elements and other human beings and perhaps animals that helped to produce the food...All these and more are somehow woven together into this piece of paper. This paper has the clouds, the rain and the soil in it. For some, though not for all, this kind of awareness does open up some sense of the sacredness of Nature. (2015, p. 36)

It may be within this impeccable mindfulness of daily activities that there are opportunities to engage in change. Making a difference through individual choices becomes an important way to shift patterns of *mindless* behavior and consumption. Donald Rothberg, a leading teacher of socially engaged Buddhism, writes of the possibilities of “compassionate action in the contempo-

rary world” (2006, p. 139). He explains, “it is possible and very important to make choices that add as little as possible to the problems, even if it is virtually impossible not to be complicit in some way” (p. 138). Mindfulness offers “more than simply being present. With clear comprehension, we know the motivations behind our actions” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 11). Considering the growing awareness and popularity of mindfulness in modern American culture, the implications for positive environmental change seem hopeful.

In a study conducted in Indonesia, cultural practices were researched as the relationship between prayer, nature, creativity (ritual arts), and human flourishing find a balance of well-being. The culture and arts emerge as the community regard their forests as “a global atmospheric filter and therefore are conceived as guardians of the world’s ecosystems” (Butler, 2016, p. 84).

This is extant in Bali where the socio-agrarian-religious *subak* irrigation system, network of temple complexes, settlement layout, life-cycle rituals, ceremonial arts, and daily *sesajen* offerings of flowers, victuals, incense, and holy water are greatly varied based on the principle of Tri Hita Karana (three causes of goodness and prosperity), which are a harmonious relationship between human beings and with nature and with God/the Source of Life in accord with the specific place, time and conditions. Thus, these and other forms of cultural creativity are the living out of prayer itself and not only benefiting local communities but also participating in the conservation of the world’s ecosystems. (2016, p. 85)

In this study, there are lessons on the potential balance of landscape, culture, art, and the human population; the “unity in diversity” of the people in Indonesia offer contributions to the under-

standing of the resourceful conservation of both natural and cultural environments through contemplative practice.

Mindfulness as a means to create behavioral changes that could make positive impacts on slowing or reversing global warming is emerging as an important new field of study. In developing the potential for modern lifestyles to benefit from mindfulness, a program is being introduced at the University of Wisconsin that is highly innovative. An 8-week course called Mindful Climate Action (MCA) is a multidisciplinary program focused on mindfulness-based trainings to address and modify behaviors related to environmental sustainability (Barrett et al, 2016). The study will ask the participants to look at their behavior, and “challenge the assumption that human health and happiness require large fossil fuel energy inputs” (p. 106). The curriculum includes meditation, with education about living sustainably, and insights focused on slowing climate change. Mindful eating, sustainable diet, water usage, exercise, energy conservation, climate connections, consumption, and ethical considerations will be integrated into the program. This program is just developing this year, and has great potential to be a model for ongoing studies and education, and may “represent a new ecological paradigm” (p. 108). This paradigm could inform future mindfulness programs that foster individual awareness of responsibility for environmental change.

Contemplative studies that address the adaptation of human response to sustainability in the midst of climate change are scarce. But it could be the inner transformation of a flexible and open consciousness that brings valuable awareness to the urgent need for social and environmental change. Through mindful attention to consumer behavior, and clear awareness of the importance of sustainability, possibilities for individual responses to global warming become attain-

able. Sweden's Lund University has created a new graduate course called "Sustainability, Mindfulness and Compassion" which indicates the possibility for wider academic space in this field.

Current knowledge on mindfulness in sustainability is both scarce and fragmented; however, it is gaining increasing momentum. The field is only just emerging; nearly all of the relevant literature has been published in the past 5 years. While there appears to be increasing consideration of mindfulness in sustainability research, practice, and teaching, most is related to practice.

(Wamsler, et al, 2017, p. 9)

Christine Wamsler, Professor of Sustainable Studies and expert in city development with a focus on inclusive climate change adaptation, approaches sustainability with both scientific and mindful disciplines. "We conclude that mindfulness can contribute to understanding and facilitating not only individual, but societal sustainability at all scales," she writes. "We end with a call for more sustainability research that acknowledges positive emotional connections, spirituality, and mindfulness in particular, recognizing that the micro and macro are mirrored and interrelated" (p. 11). This current work in the field of sustainability reflects the importance of environmental mindfulness in understanding and encouraging individual responsibility for solutions relating to global warming.

Compassion

Compassion is an essential Buddhist concept that makes way for inner and outer peace, and it extends to mindful care for the planet and all sentient beings. Human beings have an extraordinary capacity for compassion and empathy, and through mindful practice there is the potential to expand the nature of our collaborative efforts in understanding solutions to avoid fur-

ther environmental demise. The ability to come together with compassion and mutual respect is an innate human quality that often comes to the surface in times of crisis. George Monbiot writes of how we can begin to get out of the mess we have created, in his new book, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis*:

We are also, among mammals, the supreme cooperators. We survived the rigors of the African savannah, despite being weaker and slower than our predators and most of our prey, through developing a remarkable capacity for mutual aid. This urge to cooperate has been hard-wired into our brains through natural selection. Our tendencies towards altruism and cooperation are the central, crucial facts about humankind. (2017, p. 15)

It is within this return to a cultivation of compassionate responses to each other, and to the health of the planet, that there is hope for widespread engagement in social and environmental change.

Internationally, there are examples of how compassion contributes to positive impact on the global warming crisis. In a study of the influence of a Buddhist relief organization in Taiwan, there is a substantial discussion of compassionate Buddhist environmentalism (Lee & Han, 2015). The authors point to the harmonious social change achieved when “people cultivate frugal and environmentally friendly ethics” (p. 320), and found this pattern emerging in light of local natural disasters. The disciplined lifestyles and community collaboration required to produce low carbon footprints, material frugality, and effective recycling is as much an ethical and spiritual movement as it is environmental (p. 314).

Recycling is considered sacred in some Buddhist communities, and the idea of achieving the status of a compassionate Bodhisattva is applied to environmentalists who utilize the ideals

of interdependence, compassion and impermanence in their work. In a study of garbage and pollution challenges in Bhutan, Elizabeth Allison researched the religious and cultural understanding of waste in this primarily Buddhist developing country. Her field research found that rural Buddhist perceptions of “spiritual pollution that appeared more threatening than modern material waste in the villages” (2014, p. 408) illuminated the conversation of how spirituality and Buddhist tenets inform environmental action.

In considering a vision for social change that will begin to increase the health of our planet, there is an unprecedented need for simply being compassionate to each other, and to the planet. Understanding the importance of compassion is highlighted in Cornell University professor Erle Ellis’ work on the connection between environmental and social change, as he acknowledges the huge disparity of how people around the world value nature. He emphasizes the empowering value of being all-inclusive, finding common ground, and disseminating information in a way that can reshape our planet for the better. He writes, “As humans increasingly become an interconnected and interdependent global species with stabilizing populations and broadly rising welfare, it is an increasingly imaginable, if daunting, prospect that our societies might yet pool our resources to construct, connect, and sustain a global ecological niche that includes the rest of life on Earth” (2017, p. 6). It is in this compassionate and hopeful world view that the possibilities for creative and collaborative environmental and social change emerge.

Social and personal engagement for environmental change benefit from the profound influence of compassion on human behavior and interconnection. In *Mind of Clover*, Robert Aitken shares essays that examine Zen Buddhist ethics which encourage confidence of personal engagement with environmental change. He incorporates the message of the Diamond Sutra, bring-

ing forth compassion into the purity of healing the planet. He writes, “from that place of fundamental peace, come forth as a man or woman of peace, presenting peace in the inmost community of those who would destroy it” (1984, p. 173). The “mass karma” (p. 154) of global crisis, he believes, can be shifted with a leap in consciousness.

Lovingkindness, as embodied in the practice of metta, is a radiant cultivation of compassion (Salzberg, 2002). The compassion of individuals to live with integrity, kindness and attention can inspire others to do the same: “One small group of people truly dedicated to reinhabiting the earth with native, enlightened consciousness, can convince the nations” (Aitken, 1984, p. 154). In the Buddhist philosophy of non-harming of all living things, often expressed in metta practice, there comes a compassionate protection of wildlife, sea life, and humanity, as well as the habitat that nourishes them (Aspy, Proeve, 2017). Practicing metta can become a powerful way for individuals to cultivate the wish for all living beings to be at ease, “spreading kindness upward to the skies and downward to the depths; Outward and unbounded” (Metta Sutta). In this cultivation of boundless kindness, there is a gentleness towards ourselves and our communities which offers a new vision of unlimited love and sympathetic joy; with equanimity there could arise the calm inner resources to find individual solutions for understanding responsibility for the ailing planet and countless endangered species.

Interdependence

In the modern world where we are increasingly and instantaneously connected, we may benefit from a deeper understanding of interdependence, with a Buddhist view of the nature of reality. “Nothing in the universe exists in a purely autonomous way” (Ricard, “The future doesn’t hurt...yet,” 2009); while this concept of being interdependent may at first seem like a tremen-

dous bonus for finding solutions to climate change, from a Buddhist perspective, it may be exactly what is adding to the global dilemma. The Buddhist teachings of interdependence describe an unfolding, ongoing, fluid creation of causes and conditions. There is universal complicity in continuing the excessive consumption and waste that have created environmental destruction. Dogen, in his Shobogenzo essay “Space,” wrote of the interconnectedness of all existence, “This nonseparability of space seems in accord with Buddhist views...in which seemingly distant elements of space are actually one totality” (Leighton, 2007, p. 119). Interdependence of all sentient beings, including the living earth, places universal connectedness in line with the urgent need for mindful, sustainable behavior.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes of the intimate, interdependent relationship that we have with the earth, and how this potential shift in consciousness to embrace the sanctity of nature is what can bring about positive change: “The Earth is not just the environment. The Earth is *us*. Everything depends on whether we have this insight or not” (2013, p. 27). To be deeply aware of this constant interconnection with all living beings and the planet, requires open-minded awareness and mindfulness. As we consider the human condition today, the rigor with which we need to understand the conditions that have gotten us here, and the collective changes in causes moving forward, will require expanded and awakened consciousness around the globe.

Understanding the concept of interdependence, with the intention of harmony and survival in this time of global crisis, is a timeless and profound message. In the introduction to the watershed volume of essays in the book *A Buddhist Response to The Climate Emergency*, the Dalai Lama shared his concern as he “calls upon people to make continued efforts to reverse and remedy the degradation of our environment” (2009, p. 25). The following stanza was originally

composed in 1989, nearly 30 years ago, when ecological responsibility was a relatively new message; the Dalai Lama shared this around the world:

Being attentive to the nature

Of interdependence of all creatures,

Both animate and inanimate,

We should never slacken in our efforts

To preserve and conserve the harmony of nature. (2009, p. 31)

The planet is our only home, and the Buddhist response to global warming is filled with compassion, along with a rising up together to relieve the earth and all sentient beings from suffering. Interdependence, compassion, and mindfulness are all threads of the Dharma that are at the heart of the Buddhist response, and evoke a call to action for the planet. It is the letting go of greed and clinging to material consumption, and a deep understanding of the connection to nature, that leads to pro-environmental behavior (Barbaro & Pickett, 2015).

In looking for a new path of global development that is socially just and environmentally sustainable, while recognizing the interdependent nature of the global crisis (de Witt, 2014), some research shows the potential for change within an interdependent, collaborative society. Annick Hedlund-de Witt, a Dutch scholar and change-maker in the field of cultural and inner transformation for global sustainability, emphasizes the consideration of different worldviews in the discussion of sustainable growth and quality of life. The ability to see the crisis of climate change from different worldviews, while respecting the cultural, social and spiritual philosophies of others, plays an important role in environmental stewardship. David Loy emphasizes the Buddhist perspective in creating a new, evolving worldview in this time of crisis:

It is very unlikely that we'll be able to address the other crises successfully unless we also realize what is dysfunctional about the worldview that predominates today — and challenge it with a better one. (2015, p. 66)

Policy making and communication based in mindful awareness positively affects decisions for development (Barbaro & Pickett, 2015). Sustainable and healthy life depends on this careful and respectful approach to growth and cultural survival. Environmental planning and management, as they come from a place of connectedness to nature, was explored by researchers in Malta. They noted that “a focus on interconnectedness and dependence with the environment may result in enduring and committed conservation action” (Restall & Conrad, 2015, p. 273). The idea of interdependence, as a fluid and collaborative cultural wave of action, brings an ancient Buddhist idea into the modern context of social change.

Connecting personal education to the planet in crisis is another key to our survival. Kenneth Tobin writes of connecting science education to personal lifestyle changes with attention to global warming, focusing on the links between emotions, wellness, mindfulness and the environment. His research includes identifying interventions to reharmonize the body when it is not in balance, and exploring how science education must change to address sustainable lifestyles (p. 7). The integration of Buddhist tenets come from his respect for the collaborative studies done with meditation and mindfulness, breaking down the barriers of science and spirituality. This ability to be open to collaboration with other fields of study, and to learn from others while incorporating new opportunities, has helped to move mindfulness into new arenas of science and environmental research.

Embracing interdependence as a call to moral responsibility for the environment is also an important, and relevant, theme in Aldo Leopold's work. A pioneer in the philosophy of conservation, ecological restoration, and education focusing on humanity's relationship with the natural environment, Leopold wrote, "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (1949, p. xviii). He wrote of a land ethic that is rooted in collective and simple care for each other, the land, and the relationships within community. The motivation for caring comes from a deep sense of ecological consciousness and responsibility, with all beings and the earth benefiting. His work, written over 50 years ago, paved the way for an enlightened connection to the earth, with a shared love for the wonders of the outdoors. Eco-Buddhist teachings use Leopold's work to illustrate the ethics of the environment, and our complex interdependence with the earth (Edelglass, 2017). Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer, created the term *deep ecology* in the early 1960's, and wrote:

One of the great challenges today is to save the planet from further ecological devastation, which violates both the enlightened self-interest of humans and the self-interest of nonhumans and decreases the potential of joyful existence for all. (2008, p. 82)

Naess was critical of the overdevelopment of the United States, and wrote of the importance of balance, awareness and interconnection with the earth. The grassroots movement of deep ecology continues to evolve in light of the increasing urgency to find solutions for global warming.

This year's release of Paul Hawken's book *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*, is an example of the power of interdependence as a positive force in environmental change. Included in this seminal volume are 100 scientific, acad-

emic and environmental projects around the world that take creative and positive steps towards *drawdown*, or “the point in time when the concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gases begins to decline on a year-to-year basis” (Hawken, 2017, p. x). The collaboration of scientists, scholars, spiritual leaders, field researchers and writers in creating this project will be an ongoing source of hope and ideas; the online component of participation and dissemination of information is vital. The nature of our current geological age, the Anthropocene, is one of not only increasing global changes in climate and health, but one of sociocultural change. “Contemporary societies are transforming the world at rates and scales unprecedented for any other species in Earth’s history” (Ellis, 2017, p. 1). Ellis points to the possibility of global conservation and connectivity offering solutions of earth stewardship that could potentially protect and stabilize the planet.

We see global warming not as an inevitability but as an invitation to build, innovate, and effect change, a pathway that awakens creativity, compassion and genius. This is not a liberal agenda, nor is it a conservative one. This is the human agenda. (Hawken, 2017, p. xi)

With an appreciation for the interdependence and responsibility of each human being on this planet, we are beginning to see movements of collaboration, and calls to action, coming from all walks of life, around the globe.

Impermanence

The Buddhist teaching of impermanence is a profound lesson for modern consumers to understand how to let go of clinging and greed, especially as it relates to sustainable consumption. In focusing on the potential for mindfulness to be integral in solutions for climate change,

the topic of individual consumption is pivotal. Mindfulness as an antidote to *mindless* consumption can lead to both personal and planetary improved well-being (Bahl et al, 2016). In recognizing individual mindful behavior, consumer habits can be radically transformed with mindfulness increasing open-mindedness and engaged awareness (Silberstein et al, 2012). The attachment to material things, leading to greed and craving, is an area that Buddhist teachings can lend wisdom to relieve modern suffering. Thich Nhat Hanh writes, “Mindful consumption is the way to heal ourselves and to heal the world,” (2008, p. 13). The realization of the impermanent nature of everything, as well as a deeply mindful approach to the use of resources and acquiring of material belongings, offers freedom from habitual consumerism. In considering impermanence with regard to the ephemeral quality of the planet, time and space, Leighton writes:

Impermanence can be more fully appreciated, and celebrated aesthetically, as it is depicted visually through the space from the poet to the mountains lining the horizon, and to the moon so far beyond but still glowing. Time is marked by impermanence, but space is ever present to help in remembering it. (2007, p. 107)

This concept of the transitory nature of the universe is also a reminder of the delicate fragility of the health of our environment.

In looking at the relationship between personal and planetary well-being, a research study found that meditative and mindful experiences, and lifestyle, play an important role in subjective well-being (Jacob, Jovic, & Brinkerhoff, 2008). The study of participants show that when behavior and lifestyle matches one’s values and ideals, they are likely to enjoy greater well-being.

“This is in contrast to material accumulation, where the opportunities are ultimately finite, and excess threatens ecosystem survival” (p. 276). While they acknowledge the potential for a more

ecologically sustainable lifestyle that is based on mindfulness, they also recognize the need for further studies. Their questionnaire and research with more than 800 participants are useful indications of how ecologically sustainable behavior and mindful meditation can lead to well-being. It shows the positive effects of non-attachment to materialism in consumer culture, and how spiritual awareness and a deeper relationship with the natural world leads to improved well-being for both self and the environment.

A recent article looked at the possibility that “green lifestyles” may be more about self-image than actual sustainable behavior (Binder & Blankenberg, 2017). The authors explored the attitudes and behavior surrounding materialism, consumer habits, and environmental activism as they lead to subjective well-being and a heightened self image. The “green identity” of their participants showed that the high cost and social nature of an environmentally friendly lifestyle did not compare to the increased well-being gained from environmental activism and volunteerism. This exploration of how participants consider their contribution to the well-being of the planet is an interesting look at how tangible lifestyle choices and social activism are perceived and valued by individuals. The complexity of modern consumption and behavior, as well as the level of importance of individuals’ self images, are provocative results in this research study from the United Kingdom.

The importance of intention in human consumer behavior makes a difference not only in consumer habits, but in the long term behavior of energy usage (Goodsite & Sanderson, 2015); a recent research study emphasized economic incentives, social influence and environmental attitudes as related to consumer behavior. An article by Harvard University professor John Stilgoe discusses the issues that the artificial environments which many people find themselves in cause

exhaustion and debilitating desperation. In “Gone Barefoot Lately?” (2001), he warns of the desperation and fear that many Americans feel with regard to the natural world, because of their isolation from wild places. Written during the rise of widespread attention to Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn), he pointed to the potentially “fruitful collaboration among the medical design, and environmental studies communities on behalf of a public desperately seeking sustained well-being” (Stilgoe, 2001, p. 244). In understanding intention and impermanence, through mindfulness, there is hope to shift human habits of consumption to benefit the health of the earth and all beings.

Poetics of the Wild

The study of ancient Buddhist teachings inspired my exploration of how they are creatively expressed in poetry, particularly the lyric eloquence that describes the intricate connection of the poet, nature, and the Dharma. “*Poetics of the Wild*” is my way of describing the human grace arising in celebration and expression of the wildness of nature; poetry, including my own, can be an example of how creativity inspires a deep sense of connection to nature, and the wild creative mind that intends to capture the profound value and beauty of nature. This creative connection may instill responsibility and engagement for individual awareness of solutions for the environmental crisis. The immersion of the human spirit in nature offers an expression of the essence of the earth, and the deep human connection that is revealed.

From a Buddhist perspective, a sense of spiritual freedom remains in nature; from the stillness of the woods comes joy and awakening. Poetry is the experience and expression of the human condition; Buddhist poetry infuses the wisdom of the Dharma into a creative and contemplative appreciation of the natural world. Gary Snyder’s passion for language and nature rises

from his Buddhist sensibility; he writes of the connection between a contemplative life, poetry and the Buddha.

Following the practice of meditation must have a little to do with getting “beyond wild” in language. Spending quality time with your own mind is humbling and, like travel, broadening. You find that there’s no one in charge, and are reminded that no thought lasts for long. The “marks” of Buddhist teaching are impermanence, no-self, the inevitability of suffering, connectedness, emptiness, the vastness of the mind, and a way to realization. A poem, like a life, is a brief presentation, a uniqueness in the oneness, a complete expression, and a gift. In the NO play Basho (“Banana Plant”) it is said that “all poetry and art are offerings to the Buddha.” (1995, p. 115)

The voices that rise through Buddhist-inspired poetry often capture the rhythms and beauty of the earth in ways that inspire deeper connection, compassion, caring, and consciousness. Beginning with a discussion of ancient Buddhist poetry, including Zen poetry and haiku, I will then explore several contemporary poets whose Buddhist practice influence their work.

Ancient Buddhist Poetry

Ancient Buddhist poetry emerges from a tradition that treasures nature, of which human beings are an integral part. The importance of trees and nature are a consistent theme and setting for many of the pivotal events in the Buddha’s life, including where he was born, gained enlightenment, and died (Swearer, 2001). The profound moral and spiritual issues of Buddhist philosophy, rooted in compassion, are at the heart of a transformative environmental ethic. Shantideva, an eighth century Indian monk and poet wrote:

From birdsong and the sighing of the trees,
 From shafts of light and from the sky itself,
 May living beings, each and every one,
 Perceive the constant sound of Dharma. (n/d, p. 168)

This poem reflects deep connection to nature and the universal truths that the Dharma offers for all sentient beings. Nature is woven through Shantideva's verses as a vibrant part of a wholesome, contemplative practice. Nature is a refuge where freedom and mindfulness thrive:

So, revolted by our lust and wanting,
 Let us now rejoice in solitude,
 In places empty of all conflict and defilement:
 The peace and stillness of the forest. (n/d, p. 121)

In an era of environmental and human crises, the deep moral attention to respecting the value and nurturing of nature becomes the responsibility of each individual. Expressed in poetry, the voices that speak for the earth touch a primal and familiar place within.

The deep and simple appreciation for nature is profoundly expressed in the following stanza from a poem by the Buddha's great disciple Elder Mahakassapa:

Those upland glades delightful to the soul
 Where the Kaveri spreads its wildering wreaths
 Where sound the trumpet-calls of elephants;
 Those are the hills wherein my soul delights. (n/d, p. 101)

In this verse, there is a spiritual unity of man and nature, celebrated in expressions of joy and delight. The description of the Kaveri River, in India, brings life and spirit to the water and the

landscape. In early Buddhist poetry, the harmony of man and nature is depicted in a way that all beings are celebrated as part of an interconnected universe.

In a series of poems written in China in the late eighth century, Buddhist poet Han-shan expresses the lure and solitude of living in the mountains. The Cold Mountain Poems were said to have been written on rocks and trees. Following is a stanza from the series that includes both the deep connection with the earth, and an exploration of the poet's isolation in nature.

Here is a tree older than the forest itself;
The years of its life defy reckoning.
Its roots have seen the upheavals of hill and valley,
Its leaves have known the changes of wind and frost.
The world laughs at its shoddy exterior
And cares nothing for the fine grain of the wood inside.
Stripped free of flesh and hide,
All that remains is the core of truth. (n/d, p. 55)

In this description of the forest, the poet writes of the trees as living beings that seem to have feelings and memories. The old tree, as if a wise old person, has stood strong through years of wind and weather; the tree, like an aged and wrinkled person, is seen for its exterior and not the years of strength and wisdom within. Through this description of a tree, the poet is stripping the layers of physical being down to the "core of truth," which is the presence of life and connection in every sentient being.

Zen Buddhist poetry, influenced by deep meditative practice, is often expressed in haiku verse as part of a spiritual journey. "The way of haiku is to return to nature" (Strand, 1997,

p. 11), and is an art form that leads to self-awareness within the context of nature. Haiku is written in seventeen syllables, with a 5-7-5 format. Matsuo Basho, one of the most famous of the haiku masters of the 17th century, wrote “There is one thing which flows through all great art, and that is a mind to follow nature, and return to nature” (p. 37). One of his more well-known haikus is the “frog enlightenment poem” (Donegan, 1990):

Ancient pond
frog jumps in
sounds of the water

The simplicity of the verse reveals an intricate and expressive story of the reverence for nature. The close attention paid to the movements and sounds in nature places both the poet and reader in an intimate relationship with the environment.

The language of haiku is an expression of human being’s capacity to be one with the natural world. Clark Strand, a former Zen Buddhist monk and former editor of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, writes of this ease of connection:

Oneness is there already when we look at nature. A daisy, for instance.
We look at its whiteness, its yellow face, the green stem coming up to
the ankle or the calves. Merely looking at a daisy we achieve oneness
on the spot. No need even to say “achieve.” Oneness is there already.

Looking itself is oneness. Looking is the activity of oneness. (1997, p. 80)

This deep connection to nature is a profound part of Zen practice, which inspires both poetic verse and meditative peace. The following is another haiku by Basho:

Autumn evening
on a withered branch
a crow is perched.

This haiku is another example of how the poet is so in tune with nature, and the mind so still, that the simplicity of the verse expresses a vast understanding of the interconnection of nature and beings. In an essay about the power of the Dharma with regard to the ecological crisis, Doug Codiga writes, “Zen practice and a sense of place are symbiotic. The practice is a means to identify with the local ecology and to express this identification. To act upon this identity is to protect our place from harm, as we would protect any loved one” (2009, p. 110). The expression of this love and protection of nature is celebrated, exquisitely and simply, in Zen poetry.

Modern Buddhist Poetry

In modern times, it is the occasional and deep connection with nature that may rekindle the inspiration to protect it. In describing the art of the haiku, Clark Strand writes:

Because we have forgotten nature, there is a feeling of loss at the heart of modern people. We try to fill the inner lack with wealth and power, or with distraction, but this does no good at all. Each age has its own unique sadness. This, it seems to me, must be our own. Is it any wonder we have lost the meaning of our lives?
(1997, p. 11)

It is in the present moment of awareness that poetry can express the desperate beauty of our vanishing landscapes. Zen poets have long shared the remarkable art of words, celebrating moments in nature and the transcendence of enlightenment (Harris, 1999). Modern poets who are inspired

by Buddhist traditions, offer a wide view of our humanity as it is interwoven within the course of environmental change.

This excerpt from Drew Dellinger's poem "Hieroglyphic Stairway" is a powerful example of how poetry can be a passionate call to engage in social and environmental change. As the founder of Poets for Global Justice, Dellinger is modern voice of a spiritual connection to the aching earth. With a Buddhist sense of awareness, social engagement, and the lifetimes that are contained in our collective karma, this poem represents an awakening to the power of *poetics of the wild*.

it's 3:23 in the morning
and I'm awake
because my great great grandchildren
won't let me sleep
my great great grandchildren
ask me in dreams
what did you do while the planet was plundered?
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?

surely you did something
when the seasons started failing?

as the mammals, reptiles, birds were all dying?

did you fill the streets with protest
when democracy was stolen?

what did you do

once
 you
 knew? (2011)

These words cut to the very heart of the urgency of environmental mindfulness, and to my inquiry into the value and positivity within a Buddhist perspective towards living sustainably, as we engage in saving our endangered planet. Looking inward for answers to the global crisis will likely benefit from a mindful and compassionate approach in defending and protecting our home: a planet in peril.

Gary Snyder's poetry of nature brings a modern sensuality and interplay to the nature of nature; his style is often metaphoric, imaginative and is filled with innuendo and levels of meaning (Tsai, 2009). He once said, "I am a poet who has preferred not to distinguish in poetry between nature and humanity" (1996); this intimate connection to the earth is at the heart of the poetics of the wild. These lines from Snyder's eco-poetic verse "Riprap" show his subtle use of present moment awareness and his deep connection to nature:

Lay down these words
 Before your mind like rocks.
 placed solid, by hands
 In choice of place, set
 Before the body of the mind
 in space and time:
 Solidity of bark, leaf or wall
 riprap of things:
 Cobble of milky way,

straying planets,
These poems, people,
lost ponies with
Dragging saddles --
and rocky sure-foot trails. (1965)

The rhythm of physical, almost primal, interaction with nature is reflected in the stony, sparse language of the verse. In Snyder's poetry, there is a vague line between inner and outer nature (Tsai, 2009). This intertwining of humanity and the earth becomes a place of inquiry into our place in the universe. His poetry offers a sense of the wild, with a reverence for both human life and environmental respect. Snyder writes, "Art, beauty, and craft have always drawn on the self-organizing 'wild' side of language and mind....Our hope would be to see the interacting realms, learn where we are, and thereby move toward a style of planetary and ecological cosmopolitanism" (1995, p. vii). His Buddhist perspective imbues his poetry with a grounded sense of being in present moment awareness, with a lyrical way of teaching impermanence and ecology of our planet.

Philip Whalen, a Zen Buddhist monk who spent many years as a writer amidst the Beat movement in California and Oregon in the 1950's and 60's, expresses his vision of the world with a mixture of Buddhist sensibility, humor and stream of consciousness awareness. This excerpt from "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" is a vivid example of how contemporary Buddhist-inspired poetry weaves a deep connection to the earth into the poetics of modern life:

What we see of the world is the mind's
Invention and the mind

Though stained by it, becoming
Rivers, sun, mule-dung, flies—
Can shift instantly

A dirty bird in a square time

Gone

Gone

REALLY gone

Into the cool

O MAMA!

Like they say, "Four times up,

Three times down." I'm still on the mountain. (2007)

In Whalen's poem, there is an innate connection and comfort within the natural world. As he describes the human dynamics of existence and curiosity, he finds liberation and profound meaning from the sometimes surprising and always curious surroundings of the natural world. In his words are the very heart of stillness and freedom that the Buddhist perspective of the environment offers. The profound importance of creativity in a time of fear and change is found the language of nature.

The lyrical and deep connection to the earth through poetry reflects the one-ness and interdependence of early Buddhist teachings. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver is a visionary writer who inspires close attention to the wondrous natural world around us. These lines from "August" are an example of the sensual descriptions she writes about in the lush, familiar landscape she treasures.

When the blackberries hang
swollen in the woods, in the brambles
nobody owns, I spend

all day among the high
branches, reaching
my ripped arms, thinking

of nothing, cramming
the black honey of summer
into my mouth; all day my body
accepts what it is. (1993)

In this poem, we are treated to the sensory delights and mysteries of nature. Oliver describes the pleasure of picking and eating berries in a sumptuous way, and there is little separation between the brambles, the creeks, the berries and the poet. This harmonious and delightful union of nature and human in the modern world, so beautifully expressed in Oliver's poetry, is also a reminder of the importance of appreciating, loving and protecting the environment around us.

The acclaimed Beat writer and poet, Allen Ginsberg, was heavily influenced by his Buddhist studies. Studying with the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa, Ginsberg was inspired to write poetry that evolved from the breathing of shamatha meditation. He once said, "Writing poetry is a form of discovering who I am, and getting beyond who I am to free awareness of consciousness, to a self that isn't who I am. It's a form of discovering my own nature, and my own identity,

or my own ego, or outlining my own ego, and also seeing what part of me is beyond that” (Poetry Foundation, 2017); Ginsberg’s verse often intertwines specific sense of place with the messiness of being human. From “A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley”:

All afternoon cutting bramble blackberries off a tottering
brown fence
under a low branch with its rotten old apricots miscellaneous
under the leaves,
fixing the drip in the intricate gut machinery of a new toilet;
found a good coffeepot in the vines by the porch, rolled a
big tire out of the scarlet bushes, hid my marijuana;
wet the flowers, playing the sunlit water each to each,
returning the godly extra drops for the stringbeans and daisies (1956)

With an interesting similarity to the subject in Mary Oliver’s poem “August,” Ginsberg’s nature is invaded by human wastefulness and deteriorating urban life. The resilience of the blackberries feeds the poet’s search, and the growth of flowers and vegetables in the midst of the city is celebrated within a sense of isolation and loss.

Jane Hirshfield, a contemporary poet whose work often evokes environmental and social awareness, is a practicing Zen Buddhist. Her writing is layered in the beauty of the tangible, but invites the reader to dig deeper within her poetry to find a sense of being and place. These lines from “Three Times My Life Has Opened” are a lyrical and lovely example of how she weaves the interconnectedness of nature with humanity:

But outside my window all day a maple has stepped from her leaves
like a woman in love with winter, dropping the colored silks.

Neither are we different in what we know.

There is a door. It opens. Then it is closed. But a slip of light
stays, like a scrap of unreadable paper left on the floor,
or the one red leaf the snow releases in March. (1997)

It is in the sharp attention to present moment awareness that Hirshfield elevates the conversation of what it means to be human, and how we are intricately woven into the shared beauty and delicacy of the world. The distinctly feminine voice and exquisite beauty of her language lends a power and clarity that is at once grounded and boundless. The preciousness of nature is expressed with distinct language that calls on the reader to see the value and fragility of all life.

Contemporary poetry can be an accessible and inspiring way to bring awareness and engagement to environmental issues. In a recent project at New York University, a group of artists and environmental studies students created a project called *Dear Climate* (2015), an interactive invitation for personal engagement with climate change. Going beyond awareness of the physical responsibility for the environment (reducing consumption, recycling, etc.), they explored the deeper realms of personal experience of climate change: fear, desire, vision, imagination (Zurkow et al, 2015). The result is series of poetic graphic designs that challenge the audience to be conscious of their profound connection to the planet and current crisis. It is a useful way of looking at survivalism through our inner world, and it is an example of the power of art, language and creativity to inspire social engagement. The verses are memorized, or posted in appropriate locations. For example, when turning on a water faucet, a person following this practice will mentally recite:

Water flows from high in the mountains.

Water runs deep in the Earth.

Miraculously, water comes to us,

and sustains all life.

Social campaigns for awareness and action continue to evolve in creative and virtual ways, and raising consciousness in this globalized fast-paced world can be effective for positive change (Yurdakul, 2012). Washing one's hands can become an occasion for renewing one's dedication to the environment:

Water flows over these hands.

May I use them skillfully

to preserve our precious planet.

Creative poetics offer insight into the environmental crisis that can inspire deep intention for change. Throughout the poetics of the wild, there is a certain reverence of nature as a place of restoration of the calmness of life (Swearer, 2001). The moral and ethical issues that are at the heart of mindful solutions for global warming are expressed in ways that give voice to a planet in crisis.

Environmental Mindfulness Survey

The purpose of my research survey was to collect data to understand whether mindfulness is a factor in individuals' actions with regard to global warming. In understanding how a Buddhist perspective applies to modern, sustainable lifestyles within the global environmental crisis, questions were asked to explore whether there is a correlation between mindfulness and individual responsibility for sustainable living. The moral responsibility for the future of our

planet sits squarely on this generation's shoulders. Kathleen Dean Moore, a moral philosopher, writer and fierce environmental advocate (often in the name of her grandchildren), describes it this way:

To act with moral integrity is to match our actions to our moral beliefs, to do what's right, because we believe it's right, and for no more complicated reason. Through each everyday decision about what to invest in, what to eat, what to learn, what to buy and what to refuse to buy, how (or whether) to raise children, how to spend time, and how to treat neighbors, we can make our lives into works of art that embody our deepest values. (2016, p. 28)

The questions I posed in my survey were intended to awaken a sense of personal responsibility, and to understand how participants' behavior may be a reflection of mindfulness. Connection to nature, meditation practice, consumption, and awareness of what participants did that day to make a difference, all provided insight into the value of mindfulness with regard to responsibility and solutions for environmental distress. The *Environmental Mindfulness* survey included questions about whether participants are fearful of global warming, if they practice meditation, spend time in nature, recycle, eat meat, and shop locally.

The survey was created and administered online, through Survey Monkey. The survey included 14 questions, and I chose to send it to my personal contact list of approximately 2,250 email addresses. I also posted the survey on Facebook and Instagram, on the Global Mandala project page (which I created for this purpose), as well as my personal social media pages. With 2.5 percent of email recipients opting out, 3.2 percent of addresses bouncing back, and an unknown number of addresses no longer viable, I had a small total response rate of 2.5 percent, or

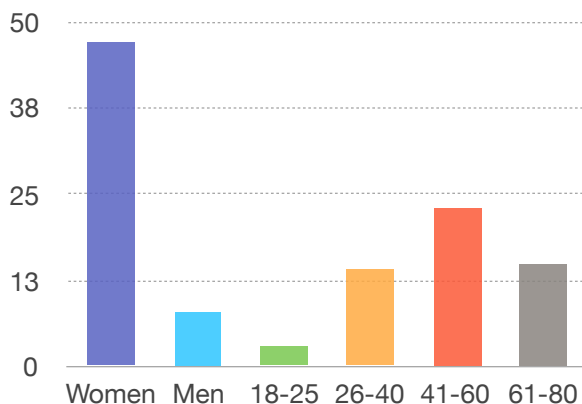
49 responses via email. I also received seven completed surveys through my social media posts, for a total of 56 responses.

Participants

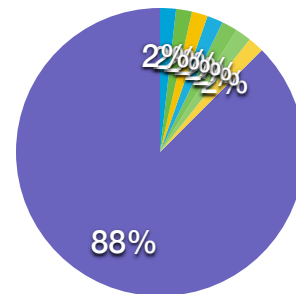
The participants were primarily female (85 percent). I only offered two choices to my question, “Are you male or female?” I received important feedback regarding the inclusion of people who may not identify with either of those choices. One person skipped this question for that reason; future surveys would benefit from making the gender question open-ended, so people can name their own gender choice.

The majority of the participants were between the ages of 41-60 (42 percent), with participants in the 26-40 age group representing 25 percent of the total. I did not ask ethnicity, as I was not focusing on socio-economic or ethnic background as factors in this survey; future studies will benefit from including a more diverse population. As a 56-year old woman living in the eastern United States studying mindfulness and Buddhism, my contacts represent a broad range of educated, middle to upper class, primarily white people with easy access to computers and the internet.

56 total respondents, by gender and age



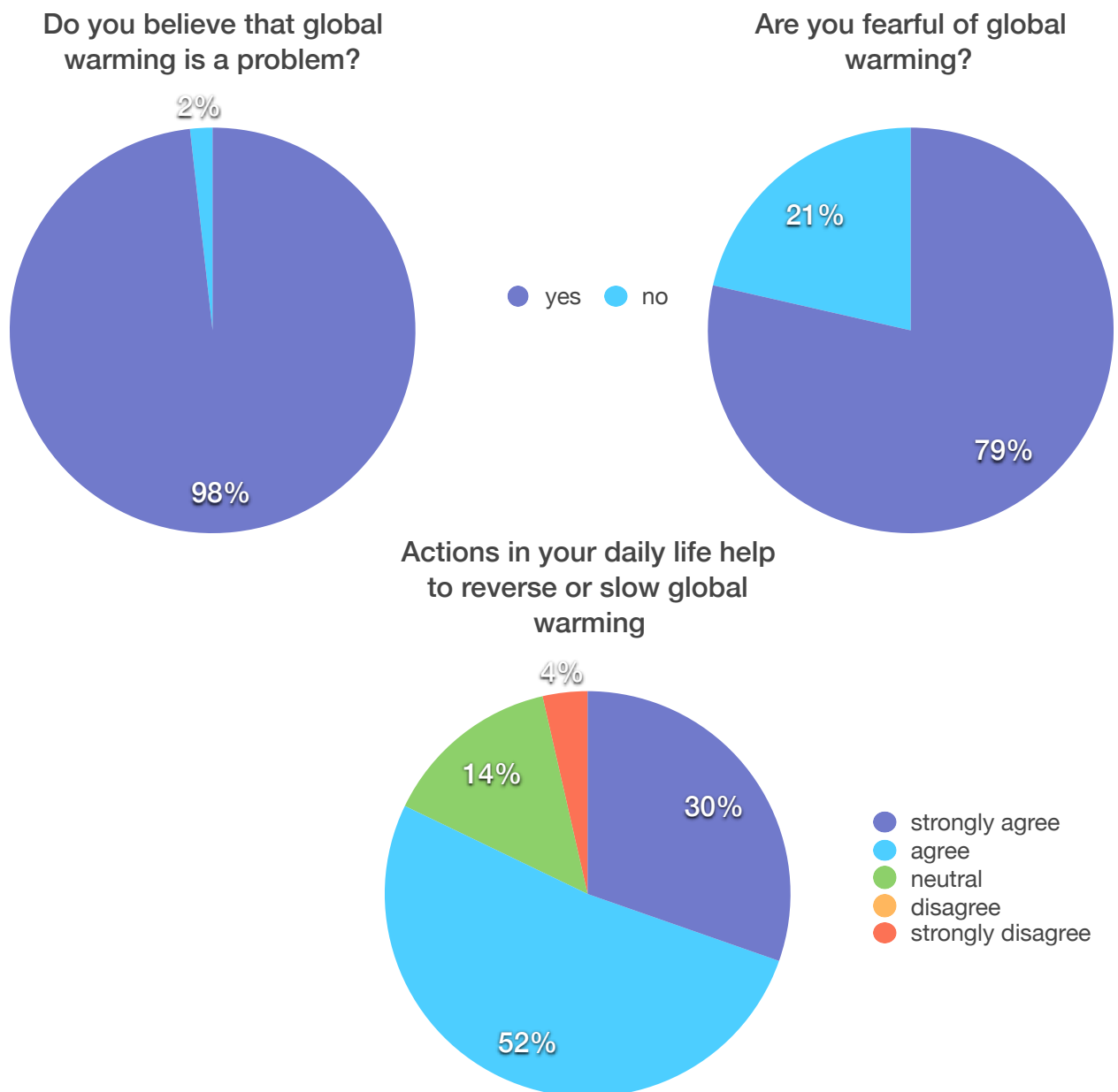
Participants by residency



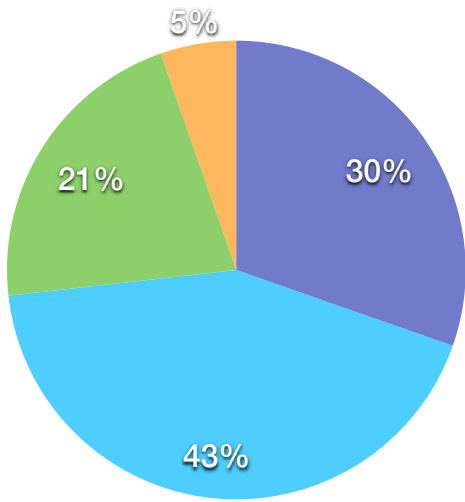
88 percent live in the USA; 2 percent each in: Finland, Hong Kong, Spain, Netherlands, Germany, Russia and South Korea

Responses

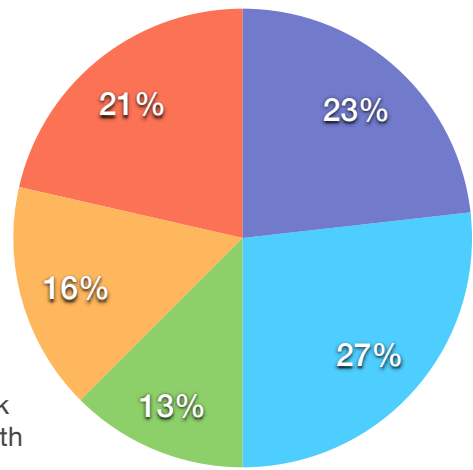
When asked the question “Are you fearful of global warming?” a majority of respondents answered yes (79 percent). Only one person answered that they did not believe that global warming was a problem. In understanding the potential engagement of people in their daily lives who are aware of adjusting their habits to make a difference in global warming, the following questions yielded these results:



How often do you walk/bike/paddle in nature?

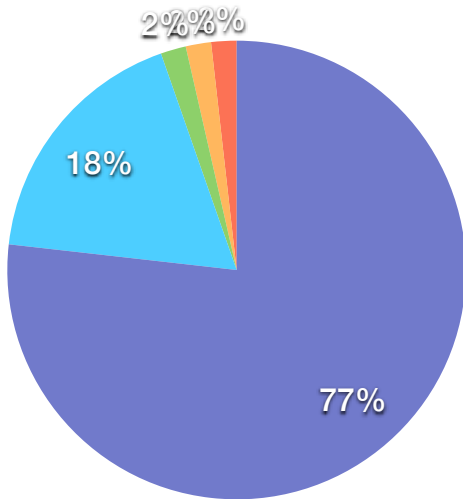


How often do you meditate?

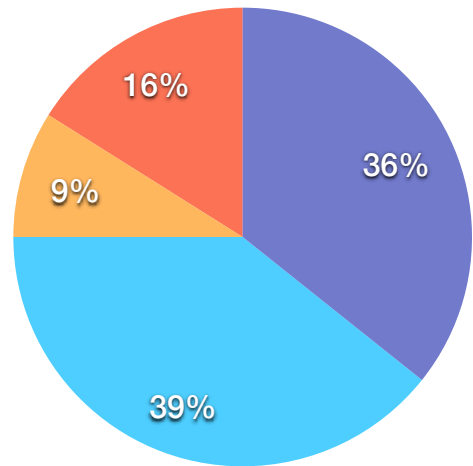


- daily
- a few times a week
- a few times a month
- rarely
- never

How often do you recycle?

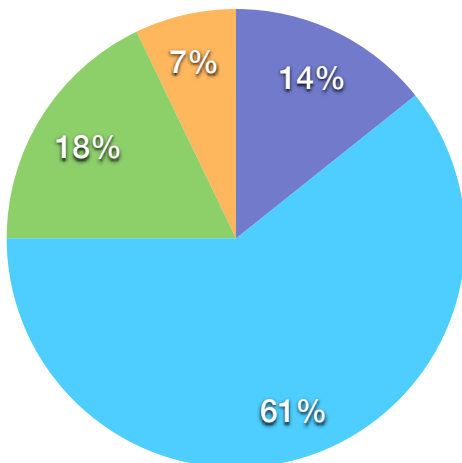


How often do you eat meat?

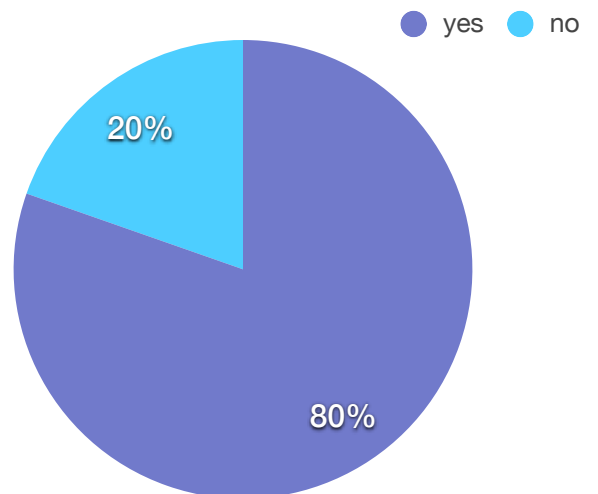


- daily
- once a week
- once a month
- rarely
- never

How often do you buy local produce and merchandise?



Do you use single-use plastic?



- yes
- no

Discussion of Results

Considering that most (82 percent) of the participants felt that actions in their daily lives help to reverse or slow global warming, this shows an inherent, basic awareness of individual responsibility. With a majority (77 percent) also recycling daily, there is a consciousness of waste management within this limited population of participants who generally have easy access to recycling facilities. Unfortunately, though, 80 percent of participants utilize single-use plastic. The word “recycling” was not used until the 1960’s; the challenges facing waste management in the last 50 years has become a key focus of attention to control further environmental destruction (Hawken, 2017). The response to the use of single-use plastics indicates the prevalence of convenience packaging in our society. Despite recycling efforts, this is a situation that creates dire results for the environment, especially the enormous, devastating problem of plastic waste in our oceans.

The question about eating meat was posed to explore the awareness of how consumption of animals relates to environmental responsibility. The methane produced by raising and breeding animals is a major factor in creating the greenhouse effect. The importance of an ethical and compassionate refrain from consumption of animal products is emphasized by Buddhist scholar Matthieu Ricard, “Thus, all that would be necessary to bring about a rapid and significant reduction in one factor causing climate warming would be to lower production of meat and dairy products” (2014). A high percentage of participants (75 percent) eat meat daily, or once a week, indicating a reliance on animal consumption that is prevalent within this survey population. Only 16 percent answered that they do not eat meat; these responses indicate the need for mindful awareness of the value of vegetarianism as a part of the solution to the climate crisis. Shopping

for local produce is another potential way to lessen negative impact on the environment, due to the packaging, transportation, pollution and waste involved in shipping produce. 75 percent of participants answered that they do buy local produce and merchandise, which may indicate an awareness of the importance of supporting local farms and businesses.

In asking how often the participants walk/bike/paddle in nature, I was interested to find out how connected to nature they are. With 73 percent answering that they are active in nature at least a few times a week, there might be a correlation between their awareness of caring for the environment to their appreciation and enjoyment of it. A wider study of more diverse cultural and urban participants may yield different results; this particular population of respondents has the means and access to outdoor recreation.

Mindfulness Results

In understanding how mindfulness affects the lifestyle choices above, I examined the responses of the thirteen people (23 percent) who answered that they meditate daily. They all agreed, or strongly agreed, that actions in their daily life help to reverse or slow global warming. They all, except for one, answered that they use single-use plastic, and recycle daily or once a week (this was the same for the majority of non-meditators' answers). Of the fourteen respondents who answered that they rarely or never ate meat, more than half (8) also practiced meditation daily. All thirteen daily meditators answered that they spend time walking, biking or paddling in nature daily or a few times a week. Perhaps this indicates that the benefits of meditation practice include a deeper connection to nature.

Although the data is very limited, I do see an indication of the correlation between meditation and living a more mindful, sustainable lifestyle. The connection to nature, and awareness

of individual environmental responsibility, could be explored further as important benefits of mindful behavior. Future research will reveal awareness of the impact of individuals' consumption habits, for example: meat eating as one of the primary causes of carbon emissions (Hawken, 2017), and how time spent in nature may translate to sustainable lifestyle choices (Barrett et al, 2016). The overwhelming use of single-use plastic reflects the availability and convenience of products wrapped in plastic (Barbaro & Pickett, 2015; Bahl et al, 2016; Lin, 2015). Being mindful of consumption is a critical factor in the ability to change harmful habits (Hanh, 2007).

With fear and helplessness often associated with environmental crisis (Barbaro & Pickett, 2015; Binder & Blankenberg, 2017; Kaza & Kraft, 2000), it is interesting to learn how people are engaged in positive environmental action in their daily lives. In the limited research studies that I have found in the field of environmental mindfulness, there is not yet conclusive data on mindfulness and sustainable behavior in light of the global environmental crisis (Wamsler, et al., 2017; Barrett, et al, 2016).

Individual Responsibility

The final question of the survey asked "What is one thing you did today that you think will make a difference in the global warming crisis?" It was asked with the intention of creating awareness, and then participation through sharing the question with others on social media platforms. The answers are a vast array of activities that people consider to be important in making a difference, and show daily awareness that small habits that can create widespread change. Although three people answered "nothing," 20 people responded that they avoided carbon emissions by either walking, riding a bike, carpooling, or driving a hybrid car. Recycling and using reusable bags was a common answer (15). Curtailing the use of water (3), backyard gardening

(4), educating children (4), not eating meat (2), using a clothesline instead of a dryer (3), and turning off the air conditioning when not home (1), are all excellent examples of how individuals can make change. One response was a description of the actual process of answering the survey questions: “I became aware that I need to and can do more.” Although participation through social media outlets did not yield any viable data, this awareness and inquiry is at the heart of understanding individual responsibility for the global crisis.

Implications of the Survey

The results of the study are of value in understanding how the 56 respondents’ answers reflect their behavior as it relates to mindfulness, their connection with nature, and their awareness of sustainable lifestyles. In writing about the consequences of individual daily actions, Buddhist scholar William Edelglass writes, “as individuals, we are morally responsible for the suffering that results from climate change” (p. 209). It may be through a continued exploration of individual awareness and responsibility that the environmental crises can be addressed from a deep understanding of mindful behavior. The implications for future studies include the need for a more comprehensive analysis of how mindfulness can play a role in sustainable consumption, meaningful interaction with nature, social engagement, and creating meaningful personal solutions for the global warming crisis.

As I explore a Buddhist perspective of the global environmental crisis, it is useful to incorporate the results of this data as a context from which to understand the current culture in the United States. It is primarily the spiritual aspect of the global environmental crisis that I explore in this thesis, from a Buddhist perspective and from the language of poetry, and it is this spiritual awareness that is the driving force of my own poetry. Inspired in part by the drawdown plan to

reverse global warming, I believe that there is hope and positivity within personal awareness of responsibility in this challenging time. Paul Hawken, editor of *Drawdown*, writes:

How each person thinks and perceives his or her role and responsibility in the world is the first step in any transformation — the base upon which all change depends. As researchers, we were and remain astonished at the impact individual solutions can have, especially as they relate to both the production and consumption of food. What we choose to eat, and the methods employed to grow it, rank with energy as the top causes and cures of global warming. Individual responsibility and opportunity do not stop there: they include how we manage our homes, how we transport ourselves, what we purchase, and more.

(2017, p. 216)

This survey was a look at a modern American perspective, with the contribution of data from a limited population, on how mindfulness may play a role in engaging change in human behavior related to the environmental crisis. I look forward to seeing future studies that will continue to reveal how mindfulness has specific value in creating change and solutions.

Conclusion

A Buddhist perspective on our interconnection with nature lends an understanding of the inner work that must be done as compassionate beings. The moral and ethical concerns of human consumption and respect for the earth are at the heart of social change. Current literature and research focused on environmental mindfulness continues the ancient conversation of compassion, interdependence, and impermanence, with a new call to action that addresses the urgent need for individual awareness and universal responsibility for a planet in crisis. Through the language of

compassion and poetics of the wild, perhaps there can emerge a new dialogue for engagement, and hope for the planet. With awareness of the need for sustainable consumption, and the societal changes required to avert ecological disaster, mindfulness of individual responsibility is paramount. Touching on the habits and attitudes of the limited, educated population in my survey leads to more questions regarding the imminent social changes needed with regard to environmental mindfulness. In sharing the poetics of the wild, there is a strong and loving voice for the earth that may touch a deep and heartfelt connection to nature. This connection may be the key to saving our planet and ourselves.

Within the Buddhist tradition are timeless lessons of transformation and liberation from suffering. From the conscious awakening of mindful living within this era of global warming, a return to a connection with nature may help to find a new path of flourishing. Thich Nhat Hanh writes of the collective energy that may come from a Buddhist perspective:

Our collective compassion, mindfulness, and concentration nourishes us, but it also can help to reestablish the Earth's equilibrium and restore balance. Together, we can bring about real transformation for ourselves and for the world.

(2013, p. 76)

Awakening to the reality of the dire environmental situation in which we find ourselves may benefit from a new understanding of ancient wisdom; this integration of individual insight, language of the poetics of the wild, and realization of personal responsibility may shed light on a new path with renewed respect and urgency for the protection of this fragile, endangered planet in crisis. My poetry which follows is an authentic and loving call to action from my heart as a

mother, an environmentalist, a lover of life, a poet, a Buddhist, and a deeply concerned citizen of this endangered planet.

Creative Project: A Collection of My Poetry

Introduction

Through my own deep connection to the wilds of nature, over a lifetime of outdoor adventure, I often express love, curiosity, concern, fear, interconnection, compassion, and anger through writing poetry. Poetry has always been my art, my outlet, my grace, my voice, and my way of being in world that I don't always understand. Volumes of poetry are boxed up and moldy at my parents' home; journals from recent years are peppered throughout my overflowing bookshelves; my old, abandoned computer has stolen many recent poems, while my new laptop has become an organized library of my outpouring of poetics lately. It is from my most recent work, since I have welcomed Buddhism and mindfulness into my life, that the *Poetics of the Wild* collection is presented.

As a child, I remember bringing my journal and a pencil into the woods from our lake house in Pennsylvania; I would hike off the trails, and find fallen trees that would become my own writing studio. In the quiet of the forest, during any given season, I would write. I was connected in a very primal way to both the woods and the water; there I was most myself, and most happy. The moonlight, the sunlight, the falling snow, the rushing brooks, the brilliance of autumn leaves, the mysterious sounds and tracks of animals, the music of raindrops, the vast salty sea, the darkness of a still lake, the cool earth or warm sand beneath my bare feet...the seemingly endless beauty of nature has always been my comfort and my inspiration.

As an English major at Colby College in the 1980's, my poetry benefited from the brilliance of professors Ira Sadoff, Phyllis Mannocchi, Charlie Bassett, and Steven Bauer. Their encouragement and our academic explorations provided a strong base for me to continue my cre-

ative and poetic writing. The undergraduate class that spoke to me most clearly was Existentialism; in this philosophical inquiry of human nature, I was both fascinated and inspired. My poetry became a much deeper investigation of who I was, how I existed within the universe, and what the meaning of life could be. This shift in cognitive curiosity has continued throughout my life. As a working, single mother for many years, my poetry became an outlet for the challenges of maintaining my own identity, as a writer and as a woman. My home and my work were often based on the proximity and accessibility of nature. Raising children in Maine, Vermont and Florida offered opportunities to explore and work outdoors; the value of raising children with a deep appreciation of nature has always been a priority for me.

Often, my love of nature is the frame around which my poetry expresses compassionate love of all kinds. In discovering the poetry of Jane Hirshfield, I found a common thread of poetics that speak to a deep sense of feminine compassion. She spoke of this in an interview recently:

I think compassion, in a way, is one of the most important things poems do for me, and I trust do for other people. They allow us to feel how shared our fates are. If a person reads this poem when they're inside their own most immediate loss, they immediately — I hope — feel themselves accompanied. *Someone else has been here. Someone else has felt what I felt.* And, you know, we know this in our minds, but that's very different from being accompanied by the words of a poem, which are not ideas but are experiences. (“Windows that transform the world,” 2015)

The bold expression of poetry that speaks from the heart, reaching out to touch others' hearts in a way that is both lyrical and raw, is a gift that I am beginning to fully realize is a profound way to communicate mindful awareness and engagement for our endangered planet.

The global warming crisis has been a source of deep concern to me for many years. In celebrating the wonders of the natural world, my poetry has shifted to reflect a deep, loving delicacy to honor the fragility of our environment. During a decade of managing kayak and paddleboard outfitters in South Florida, my attention turned to the clean water crisis. Organizing beach clean ups, and bringing awareness to the importance of resource and waste management, became a large part of my work. In managing a 365-day paddleboard expedition around the entire state of Florida in 2013 (Expedition Florida 500), I wrote daily about the desperate need for change in that beleaguered state. My voice was heard, with compassion, at the state house, local rallies for clean water, and through widespread social media posts; environmental activists there often became heated and divisive. In the midst of the very common cause of fighting for clean water, I witnessed the breakdown of advocacy and communication.

Compassionate advocacy, which I embrace as understanding the Buddhist perspective and sharing the poetics of the wild, seems to be an aware, effective, and sustainable way to express concern about environmental mindfulness. Joanna Macy, Buddhist scholar, author and environmental activist, spoke of the importance of compassion in environmental activism in an interview regarding "radical compassion":

Compassion is not something you have, like a virtue or cultivated quality. It is rather an expression of your larger being and can be understood as integral to your belonging or interbeing in the sacred living body of Earth. Compassion boils

down to not being afraid of the suffering of your world or of your self. It involves being open to what you're feeling about that suffering (grief, fear, rage, overwhelm) and brave enough to experience it....Compassion is what impels you to act for the sake of the larger whole—or put more accurately, it is the whole acting through you. (“What radical compassion means,” 2014)

The integrity of expressing honest, heartfelt concern for, and respect of, the earth and each other is at the core of my exploration in the poetics of the wild. With personal experience of environmental activism burnout, and *mindless* behavior with regard to current sustainable habits, it is from a Buddhist perspective that I offer positive hope for change.

Buddhist Inspired Poems

The following poems were written after my return from Kalachakra in India last year. The two-week teaching with the Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya was a profound experience, and the shift in my own expression of awareness and connection is evident in my recent poetry. The poem, “Sangha of the Wild,” is a plea to *listen*; it is an expression of emergence from stillness to understand what we need to hear. This poem is feistier and has a more unsettled tone than many of my previous poems, and addresses the environmental crisis head-on. “The Scent of it All” continues an exploration of the senses; an awakened, mindful awareness of the smell of nature that is being infused with unnatural and destructive forces. “Paddleboard Reflections” is both an expression of reflecting on what is reality, as well as a deeply personal experience of nature from paddling my stand-up board here in Maine.



Sangha of the Wild

Listen

Find the quietest place

pure silence and calm

Listen

to how loud it is.

The earth is breathing,

speaking to us

through raindrops and crickets

sometimes whispering, in grateful breezes

buzzing of bees and crashing of waves

sometimes gasping, in fits of panic

through gusts of wind and storms

Listen

Go to the library, church, meditation hall

silence will envelope you

just listen:

the cacophony of thought

your breathing, your neighbor breathing

the buzz of a motor, bark of a dog

silence, so often

very loud.

The earth,

our home, our planet,

the ground beneath us, the air we breathe,
screams for our attention.

Too long have we been distracted by

creating conveniences and contraptions

speeding forward, not looking down

Turning up the volume,

not knowing what

we are drowning out.

Listen

As my bare feet sink in the sand,

so do crabs, egrets, herons and terns

tangled in fishing line, choking on bottle caps

As I dive beneath the surface,

seeking clarity in the sea,

turtles and fish and seagrass

show signs of distress,

scarred by us.

Listen

I ask you a question

easy and quiet

what did you do today to help?

Some of you answer,

most of you don't

answers are tentative, hesitant,

no one seems to listen.

Find a quiet place

What?

What did I ask?

What did you hear?

What is going on beneath your feet?

What does the heavy air carry?

What is the cry in the woods, bubbles in the water, the screaming winds?

Listen

Here, right now,

I hear

a competition of sound

tractors and bulldozers

with crashes and beeping and falling trees

dropping of leaves,

poisoned rain in the wind,

frantic and relentless chirping

birds who were always here.

Listen

My footsteps crunch

in the fall leaves

my phone vibrates in my pocket

my car's fan is still running

the letters on this keyboard click

as I type this poem

Listen

To the sounds of right now

to find our way,

together,

breathing.

Tired,

Sangha of the wild.

The Scent of it All

On the fall breeze,
a scent of pine and apples
infuse the cool air
I breathe deep,
bringing the breath of life
deep into my being,
remembering salty warm air
of the beach,
frigid frosty air of winter,
fresh tingling of
every new breath
 until there is a tinge of
 exhaust
 fumes, putrid and toxic
 a whiff of trash,
 bitter odor of traffic
 smell of construction
 burning of fossil fuels
 stale stench of rotting garbage
Here, now,

in the woods
I only smell
pine trees and apples.
I am aware of the
purity
I am aware of the
value
I am aware of the
millions of people
who don't know this
precious smell
of unspoiled
nature.





Paddleboard Reflections

Gliding slow
following a baby loon and mother
my old paddle
pulls the water,
smoother
than their tail feathers

The water
eerily smooth,
invisible,
morning sun bouncing back
into my eyes
bright.
I paddle blind

Rising from nowhere
a curve of granite
solid, ancient, enormous.
I glide closer
to the raw
mystery
on silken water,
silent

Until the water falls away

The rock drops,
becoming a steep cliff below.
I ride the edge of an abyss
with nothing to ground me
up or down,
the drop, forever.
I can't reach
the rising rock

I lean into the fear of falling

until I find
it is all
an illusion



The Monhegan Poems

The following series of poems was written during a recent offshore adventure on Monhegan Island, Maine. Ten miles out to sea, on an island that was brilliant with sunshine, salt air, artists and a sense of timelessness, I wrote with impassioned focus. There, in this microcosm of planet earth, I felt a perspective that was both removed from, and deeply connected to, the enormous challenges that lay ahead to shift the devastation of global warming. My iPhone in hand, I captured this photo as I explored the island on the way back to the one small ferry that would bring me back to the mainland. As the boat left the dock, I realized that my iPhone was no longer in my backpack. With all of my photos, contacts, notes and work left behind on my missing phone, there was nothing I could do but head back home to deal with the significant material loss of my phone. The next morning, though, I received an email from a kind man on the island who had somehow found my phone on the remote trail I had been enjoying; he kindly brought

my phone back to the mainland on the next ferry. In that gesture of kindness and responsibility, I was moved to feel a small sense of hope for our global community; finding something out of place, and caring for that one small thing, can make a big difference in caring for each other as we protect our shared home, planet earth.

Monhegan

Island earth.

In this place
containing
 everything
 and nothing
we find ourselves

Suddenly
looking into each other's
eyes

for
help

A small place
with a circle

of water
and sky
barely
embracing
this orb

A small place
an island,
spinning,
seeming
to want to
shake us off.



Monhegan II

Endless horizon.

I travel by boat
ten miles out
to sea

To sit in this place,
to look back at the
mainland

to say goodbye
for now.

I pour myself
onto a warm rock,
Ancient lines and colors
surround me
striations

and fissures
from centuries of
waves pounding

The rocks are warm today
warmer than they should be
this time of year

Tonight they may well
have frost
shining in the moonlight

This place
ridiculously
exquisite,
quiet and remote

a place of reflection
and poignancy

a place that holds
onto the past
even as the future
crushes it

This place,
where I can
think and see

Finding solace in
the horizon

while anticipating
the unknown of the
incoming
tide



Gaia, Monhegan

It may be us

the women

who need to
shift this

Soft and nurturing

we smell sweet

our hair shines

we carry

weapons so fierce

and so powerful

they are hard to see

blazing in a ring of fire

it is us,

the circle of women

who choose the way.

Quietly,

and persistently

preparing life,

we bear it

we feed it
we sustain it
we celebrate it
we share it

we are it.
We are Gaia,
goddess of the earth,
carrier
of the message
the shining pearl
to find
the song,
to hear
the lesson,
to learn.

Luscious and alluring
we wrap ourselves
around the world
with compassion.

We reach out our hands
and fix what's wrong.

It may be us
the goddess women
of Gaia,
who create the circle
around this planet
to protect and provide
for everyone

Lightly,
ferociously,
with
love.



Monhegan IV

I am
 drenched in
 sunlight
 soaked in salt air
 dripping with pine needles
 and sweat

I am
noticing
everything

The distant bells
 signalling
 the beginning or
 end

to something.

The way we
prepare

to change seasons:

Geese swooping by,
hammers preparing homes,
leaves falling,
gardens harvested

Me,
I soak in
the sunshine
as if

it will never shine again.

Love in the Wild

Often, my poetry weaves nature and sensuality together as an expression of a deeply connected, rooted sense of love. Using the visual impact of creatures, sunshine, and the ocean, I explore ways to understand the complex love for each other as well as our place in the world. My poetry is a reflection of my life, my love, and my surroundings at any given time; almost all of my poetry is written in, and about, nature. The fragile state of our hearts, our interconnectedness, and deep concern for our planet is what continues to inspire me to write.

Love and Turtles

It is hard to
discern what creature this is

odd shapes
bouncing in the waves

bubbles of air,
splashing,
awkward forms bobbing.
I watch, alone,
from the heat of the beach

This is
mating season
for sea turtles,
this lovemaking
is determined, mysterious, fierce,
fascinating

They are neither
above or below the surface,
They are entwined
in a position that
resembles

drowning

One head up and gasping
only to be splashed and
covered with a rogue wave

lopsided and attached,
the tide
moves and sways
these vicious lovers
into parts unknown

They disappear
and reappear
as I watch,
wondering if it is
as difficult as it looks
for them
or simply an erotic
ride in the waves

The grace and simplicity
of one turtle
becomes a tangle of
complication with two
Until they disappear
under a wave
and leave the rest of
their day
to an underwater
mystery

Out of sight.

The Day the Sun Lit Me Up

I am on fire

The sun finds me,
my warm skin
and my long hair,
I close my eyes,
I find the sun
I soak it in

always

Solar powered, me.

I drag chairs into the sun
to work in the light,
I get up early to see the first rays
barefoot, beaches of ecstasy

sunsets
slay me
everyday

always

my face tipped up to the rays
drinking in energy
and joy and warmth
and sensual delight
of my skin feeling the
drench of color

it lights
my fire, and embers
sing in my heart
and flow out of my gaze

Funny,
how you saw it.

I knew the sun was following me,
you were sweet in shade of your trees
your art hung and swayed and
reflected the magic
of a forest that
welcomed me home.

You saw it
the sun finding me
in a glow of energy
just as my heart
was softening
wondering
curious
about your voice,
this place,
my deep joy at
simply
being with you

The sun
reached down between a space
through your tall trees
a reminder
of pure joy,
a grounding in warmth
a spotlight
on my open, grateful heart
I drank it all in,
closed my eyes
yours were on me
a moment of
sparks,
the beginning of a flame

You told
our friend
you had never seen
that before:
that glow
that washed over me
with golden magic



and I thought,
oh, sweet man,
come
with
me
in the
rays of
sunshine

It is always
with me

In a Small House by the Sea

I came to sit

with a widowed friend.

I came to bring love and laughter

She opened her door in sadness

and was smiling when I left

Her husband,

a handsome man, the love of her life,

was ashes in a wooden cranberry box

on a table in the small room where we sat,

She and I, and the love of her life.

His death came as a surprise,

even though he had been dying

a long time

His death left her alone

aching to hear his voice again.

She and I understand that

words cannot heal,

tears can be endless.

I did not pretend to have any answers,

we did not pretend not to be sad

we did not pretend that we were not

at a loss.

But we are women of strength,

women of the sea, women who have raised our children

and let them go

We are gentle warriors

with wisdom and wicked words

We have big hearts that love our men

so deeply and fiercely that

when they are not with us,

we still feel them, we still speak to them

we love them

with a power and joy

that is boundless.

I thought of my new love

as she described her old love

and I knew that we are,
really,
alone.

We come into the world
as we leave it,
alone.

In the complete perfection
of what is life,
we hold each other
close when we can
and we learn to let go
when we can't

And the moments in between,
we find rapture in
the vast undulations of the sea.



Poetics of the arts and the environment

Outdoor artist environments captivate me, and represent a creative movement that is a voice for the earth. Following my heart to work in a place where the arts and the environment intersect, I find myself now working in an outdoor sculpture preserve. This “right livelihood” allows me to share environmental mindfulness with visitors daily, and create programs that celebrate the elements of arts and nature as they spark compassion and connection. Found objects, raw and repurposed to become an extension of the artist’s vision, become an opportunity for wonder and conversation. Slowing down to see this work involves a connection between the artist, nature, and the audience that is a dynamic arena for new ways of seeing our own sense of place. As the exponential destruction of the environment is evident in the natural disasters and trash washing up around our feet, it is with reverence and awe that art also thrives in unexpected and beautiful expressions of hope and vision.

Sculptors of Compassion

With calloused hands
breathing out the warmth of passion
into the frigid morning air
making smoke
from a fire within
an artist at work

From the remnants and
strength
of materials
too rusted, splintered, weathered for anyone else

You are art
You are of the earth

Rising from the tired past, dug out
from the dust
of destruction
your strong hands
and exquisite vision
bring forth delicate expressions of resilience and joy

You wake us up

Grounded in the earth,
dirty boots and old trails,
lives that hang in the balance of ecstasy and reality
You are the
saviors of the planet, the voice of the earth,
reflection
of our own
excessive past

You are hope



Two Moments, Two Flowers

Many moons ago
 in a cove called Saturday
 far away, deep on the coast of Maine,
 I danced amidst the lilacs
 in the rain

It was June,
 in those fleeting days
 when lilacs burst into bloom,
 their scent and their color
 make me swoon

I was a young woman
 living in an old house,
 in a remote place that taught me
 the resilience of independence,
 trust in the changing seasons,
 joy in solitude

Like it was yesterday,
 I remember the moment

the rain began to fall
as I picked lilacs
next to my house

I remember the moment
when the sweet delicious smell
of lilacs, soaking in the rain
made me dance

As the rain fell harder,
I gathered the flowers
and swayed,
in a sweet fog of intoxicating fragrance
and dripping bliss,
an orgasmic moment
when I was simply
a raindrop and a flower

This year
one moment
on the other side of the world
reminded me
that there is
hope in the ruins

Somewhere between
Patna and Delhi
where India is all
trash and mud and hungry babies,
swirling smog choking me

Somewhere between
the Dalai Lama and
villages too crowded
to find my way,
somewhere in a
beautifully strange place
that both broke
and opened
my heart

I saw a flower

Fuchsia,
delicate and vibrant
glowing with life,
a hot pink bloom

growing in trash,
so much trash,
tossed in the mud
where families live in a wasteland
of misery

My eyes took in the
visual pain of
hopelessness,
children waving without smiling,
hands out,
eyes starving.

I had to ask
someone
who spoke my language
what is that pink flower?

Did you see it?

It was a lotus flower.

The symbol of
Buddhism,
ancient sutras
praising this flower,
Modern wise men
tell us:
No Mud, No Lotus
as if we
understand the mud
and know how to
welcome the lotus

The moment
of the lilacs
The moment

of the lotus
grow in my heart
as passion,
hope,
beauty in a world
grown ugly with crisis

This is all
I can share,
these exquisite
moments of joy
of awareness
of blossoming
in the heart
of truth

Concluding, With Gratitude

The offering of my poetry speaks to my passion for the environment, my love of words, my unstoppable belief in positivity and engagement. My voice is only one voice, but as I gathered the research, poetry and Buddhist wisdom for this paper, I know that my voice matters. I have a deep feeling that compassion and mindfulness will shine the light on a way out of the chaotic mess we have created here on earth. Reverence and empathy for the natural world, and all beings, is what propels us to act with wisdom and compassion. In this shifting time of global environmental crisis, I hear a loud cry for connection, respect and wisdom. As a species, there is much we can learn if simply slow down and listen. Thich Nhat Hanh describes it this way:

We humans think we are smart, but an orchid, for example, knows how to produce noble, symmetrical flowers, and a snail knows how to make a beautiful,

well-proportioned shell. Compared with their knowledge, ours is not worth much at all. We should bow deeply before the orchid and the snail and join our palms reverently before the monarch butterfly and the magnolia tree. The feeling of respect for all species will help us recognize the noblest nature in ourselves.

(2000, p. 85)

With deep gratitude for the opportunity to explore Buddhist wisdom as it enlightens a modern world that is unprecedented in challenges, I hope that the poetics of the wild that I found, wrote and shared will open hearts and minds to new ways of being.

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