

# Embracing the Planet

## Transforming the self

*“Only when we become one with nature will we be able to solve our problems.  
When one attains perfect harmony with nature, he becomes one with it.  
It is to live like the blooming of the flowers, the shining of the sun. It is to truly be oneself.”*  
—Reverend Gyomay Kubose<sup>1</sup>

The universality of suffering includes not only the suffering of humans but also the suffering of the planet. When we suffer, the planet suffers—when the planet suffers, we suffer. The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn calls this connection, “interbeing.”<sup>2</sup> Today, Earth’s suffering is apparent—in the deforestation of the rain forests, in the pollution of the air and the oceans, and in the eradication of entire species. Global warming may have already reached a tipping point of no return. Fortunately, we are in a position to help the Earth in alleviating the causes of the planet’s suffering. The naturalist John Muir once noted, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”<sup>3</sup> We are “hitched” to the universe—we are an integral part of the ecology of the planet.

Earth will be transformed as we transform ourselves—growing in our awareness of the universe within. A nineteenth-century Buddhist philosopher, Kiyosawa Manshi, describes this transformation and calls each of us to action in the following verses:<sup>4</sup>

“Unless  
the whole world is happy  
there is no happiness for me.  
A person  
as he grows becomes aware  
first of himself, then of family  
and society,  
and at last, of the entire universe.

This growth of awareness was explained  
by the Buddhas long ago.  
They themselves grew in this  
outward direction.  
Our new age  
is going in this direction too:  
the whole world is becoming  
one world, one being.  
To live strongly and righteously  
you must  
discover the galaxy within yourself,  
and remain aware of it.  
Let us seek the happiness  
of the whole world:  
the seeking of the Way  
is itself  
the Way.”

Shuichi Maida<sup>5</sup> spoke of the growth of awareness when he said: "The surest thing for a human being is the intuitive fact of human suffering and the desire to transcend it. And what is the way to transcend suffering? The answer is the way of awareness. It is to see the totality of the individual, not to see only a part of the self." By growing in awareness, we gain a new vision of planet and self.

Nyogen Sensaki tells us the story of when Hykujo passed away. One of his disciples, Isan, called a younger monk, Kyogen, to his private room and said, "You were with our old teacher for some years. Now he has gone, but you ought to know about the Dharma by this time. Tell me, where do you come from, and where are you going?" Kyogen asked Isan to allow him to go to his room for a few minutes. There he took out his notes, hundreds of sheets of them, trying to find a clue to where he had come from and where he was going.

At last, he returned to Isan and said, "I am ashamed to say I do not know. I could not find such an answer in my notes. As one of the older brothers, you should know, so please answer the question for me." Isan replied, "What I have attained is mine, not yours. You have to work it out for yourself."

Kyogen carried out this idea and retired to a little hut where he lived alone. Each morning he swept the garden, watered the plants, and watched the clouds over nearby mountains. One day as he swept the garden with his bamboo broom, he hit a pebble, which bounced against a bamboo stalk and emitted a "PING."

That sound awakened him—he understood where he came from, where he must go, and also how he must live his present life. He thanked Isan for his apparent unkindness in pushing him into a corner where he had to learn for himself. He then became a disciple of Isan.

We see the significance of Isan’s question when thinking about the condition of our planet and our interconnection with the universe. By realizing where we come from, and where are we going, we may, like Kyogen, learn how to live mindfully. Science has informed us of the suffering of the planet—calling us to action. Like Kyogen, we each must realize for ourselves how to live our present lives, tending our garden of loving-kindness—sweeping and watching the clouds—PING!

## Contemplating a Future World

Imagine a world of well-being, of loving-kindness, of compassion—populated by those we will never know—in a world we will never see. The following statement of beliefs is offered as a suggestion for those who are imagining a future based on the Bodhisattva Path<sup>6</sup>. It was first presented in a public lecture at Sunday services for the congregation of the Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple of Los Angeles.<sup>7</sup>

“I believe in the sanctity and goodness  
of the Whole Earth and all that dwell therein,  
And in the One Web of Life  
in which all are mutually sustained  
and through which all shall find purpose.  
And I believe that  
within the Household of the Earth  
where brokenness exists, it is my brokenness;  
where estrangement exists, it is my estrangement,  
where imperfection exists, it is my imperfection;  
And I therefore acknowledge  
that the destiny of my life  
and the destiny of all other life  
are one and inseparable :  
and I seek a future  
in which the broken shall be restored,  
the estranged shall be reconciled,  
and the imperfect shall find perfection,  
for myself and all other members  
of the Household of the Earth.”—*Gyoshin*<sup>8</sup>

This statement of belief describes the reality of the present and proceeds to embrace a vision of a future realm of possibilities. Of course, no one knows what the future will be, other than one of a constantly changing world. However, everyone carries, within their imagination, expectations of what that future will be.

Albert Einstein once said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution.”<sup>9</sup> One of the most revered teachings of the Buddha, from the Dhammapada,<sup>10</sup> is that our present imagination contains the seeds of future actions. The planet calls us to engage in courageous acts of imagination—creating the future as a work of art—where happiness prevails.

## Living in the Present

Thich Nhat Hanh said, “Right mindfulness<sup>11</sup> is the energy that brings us back to the present moment.”<sup>12</sup> Connecting with nature engenders mindfulness and brings us back to the present moment when our attention has wandered. In the presence of nature, we become more aware that we are a part of a greater whole.

Once, years ago, I was hiking in the forest and stopped to look at a pine tree. Somehow, I felt transfixed by what seemed to be time standing still. At that moment, I felt that the tree had become conscious of itself through me—some might call it a “mystical” experience. For me, it was a profound connection to nature.

Albert Einstein said, “A human being is a part of the whole, called by us the “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”<sup>13</sup>

However, the practice of mindfulness<sup>14</sup> is not limited to our experiences exploring nature but may be experienced in many venues. Sometimes when I am making something in my woodworking shop, I experience moments when none of my moves have any wasted motion. I reach for a tool, and it’s right there. There is a smooth flowing of my life—past planning, my hand, the tool, future hopes, the created object, all becoming one totality—celebrating the world of the present. Kyogen’s pebble hits the bamboo—PING! There! You must hear it too! We embrace the present together.

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<sup>1</sup> Kubose, G. M. *Everyday Success*. Chicago: The Dharma House. 1967 (p.113.)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order\\_of\\_Interbeing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_Interbeing)

<sup>3</sup> *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), on page 110 of the Sierra Club Books 1988 edition. This quote is found in [Chapter 6](#).

<sup>4</sup> Kiyosawa Manshi (1863–1903). *Life as Art*. Translated by Saito, Gyoko. Manuscript on file, Karida Sangha. Rio Rancho, NM.

<sup>5</sup> Maida, Shuichi (1906–1967), was one of the most important Shin Buddhist thinkers of modern Japan—see: [www.maida-center.org/home](http://www.maida-center.org/home)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.karidasangha.net/Recitations.pdf>, p.25

<sup>7</sup> Roger Irwin. 1984

<sup>8</sup> *Gyoshin* is the Dharma name given to Roger Irwin by reverend Gyoko Saito. It means “Dawn of the Heart.”

<sup>9</sup> Einstein on Cosmic Religion and Other Opinions and Aphorisms. Dover Publication, Minneola, New York. 2009. p. 97

<sup>10</sup> A collection of sayings of the Buddha—<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhammapada>

<sup>11</sup> Right mindfulness (*samyak smriti* ~ sometimes translated as “right remembering”) is one of the steps on the Buddhist “Eightfold Path.”—The practice of “remembering,” in the sense used here, means remembering to return our attention to the present, after having been distracted by extraneous thoughts. Learning to refocus our attention on the present is the key to success in the other seven practices leading to happiness.

<sup>12</sup> Nhat Hahn, Thich. *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*. Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1998. (p. 64)

<sup>13</sup> quoted in H. Eves *Mathematical Circles Adieu*. Boston, 1977.

<sup>14</sup> “Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us.”, <https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>