

A Carbon Sadhana: Cars

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In the June 2009 Shabda I published a 'Carbon Sadhana' inviting readers to visualise the carbon emitted by a flight made by a pilgrim to Bodh Gaya in India. It didn't attract much comment - but the issue hasn't gone away! So here's Part 2: a Carbon Sadhana for Cars...

The inspiration (if that's the word) for this came from seeing a billboard poster advertising some new car which used as its selling point the tagline that it emitted only 148 grams of CO₂ per kilometre. We were obviously meant to be impressed. "Let's find out what that looks like", I thought. And the image of a snake emerged...

FIRST ONE VISUALISES A VAST EXPANSE of clear blue sky: radiant, pure, stretching to infinity in all directions.

Beneath you is a ground of lapis lazuli, transparent and shining. Over the surface of the ground there are stretched a network of golden wires stretching in all directions; extending to the eight points of the compass, shining in the light. Thus the eight corners (of the ground) are perfectly filled up. All beings inhabit this land, whose true nature is the Land of Highest Happiness, the Pure Land.

You are seated in meditation on the ground of lapis lazuli. Through contact with the golden wires you feel a connection with all the ground and all beings inhabiting the Pure Land.

In your meditation you begin to move slowly, first forwards then left or right as you choose, along one or another of the golden wires. The experience of movement is pleasurable, even thrilling; there is a sense of possibility and freedom as you travel.

As you move forwards faster and faster across the ground, never looking back, you realise you are being transported in a car, new and quiet and powerful, a thing of beauty. The car is sensed rather than seen, for your attention is directed always forwards, but it adds to the pleasure you experience.

From afar you see the form of the Buddha, and you direct your movement towards him. He is vast, and still, seated in meditation. The form of the Buddha is irresistibly attractive, though you could not say exactly why. You turn towards him and direct your vehicle to move towards him, faster and faster across the network of golden wires, all of which seem to lead towards the Buddha. As you draw a little closer you see he is holding in his hand a mirror; in the mirror you see yourself seated in your car for the first time.

Faster and faster you push your car, flying across the shining ground. Strangely though, you realise you are making no progress: the Buddha remains vast, and still, and irresistibly attractive, but far away. Faster and faster you travel, until you are flying across the ground - but you realise the form of the Buddha is fading until he is barely visible.



All you can see is the mirror that he holds, and in it, you see yourself and your car reflected ever clearer. Behind the car, as it travels along the network of golden wires, you see, for the first time, a snake that rises up from the car's exhaust and obscures to some extent the beauty of the land beneath you. This snake

extends everywhere your car travels, everywhere it has travelled, and everywhere it will travel: you now see that it is many thousands of miles long and becoming longer as you continue to move, the faster you move, the faster it extends. Its body is approximately the diameter of a dustbin lid and it persists for many decades, even for more than a century before it is naturally reunited with the ground.

You hear a voice, perhaps even the voice of the Buddha. The voice says 'I have stopped, I have laid aside the stick for all beings. You are living unrestrained with living beings. Now it is time for you to stop.' You realise these are the words the Buddha spoke to the murderer Angulimala.

Rapidly you will your vehicle to come to a halt, and you leave it, to stand for the first time directly on the shining ground, facing the Buddha and his mirror. All around you is a mist, or smoke, blotting out the sight of the sky, the land, the Buddha. In this mist it is hard to see clearly: you need faith to retain your vision of the Buddha and his words. You realise this mist is nothing other than the snake, emitted from your car, caught up with you at last. This realisation is painful, but purifying - it is 'Apatrapya', shame based on respect for the opinion of the Wise. Contained within the painful feeling of shame is gratitude, for what you have learned, and joy, for the freedom that comes with insight.

You look again in the Buddha's mirror. Again you see in the mirror that each of the golden wires that cover the land are being traversed many many times, thousands upon thousands of times, by cars, and as they do so the snakes accumulate and rise high above the roads, spilling over and covering and obscuring the land on all sides.

You realise that even if you are able to follow the Buddha's words to the murderer Angulimala, and stop, that many others have not heard, and have not stopped - and that the land, and the Buddha, will be obscured until such time as many many more have done so - even, until society itself has been transformed.

As the vision fades you wake up: and as you do so you realise the ground of lapis lazuli, transparent and shining, is indeed the ground whereon we live; that the Pure Land paradise is not far; that this very body is the Buddha.

You feel a strong desire to work for the benefit of all, to help all beings to "lay aside the stick for all beings". If we can but stop, and help others to do so, what remains to be sought?

Notes: Car emissions calculations

There are approx 0.648 grams of CO₂ in one m³ of air at normal atmospheric concentration and pressure. Therefore one gram of CO₂ in air normally occupies 1.54 m³.

We are told (proudly) that a new car driving 1km emits 148g of CO₂. So, driving 1m emits 0.148gm CO₂.



This would normally occupy 0.23 m³ CO₂. This is equivalent to a cylinder 1m long & 0.23 m² area

This in turn is equivalent to a cylinder 1m long & 0.54m (21") in diameter

So a car driving 1m leaves behind it a cylinder of CO₂ 21" in diameter, about the diameter of a dustbin lid. Thus a car driving 1km leaves behind it a 21" wide snake of CO₂ wherever it goes.

Even if 'offset' by planting trees, this will persist in the atmosphere for a century or more, as will all the other snakes - and we can imagine how many of them there are, all together...