



BUDDHIST ACTION MONTH **June 2015**

Dharmic reasons to be part of BAM 2015

BAM is the UK's Buddhist Action Month - a festival of Buddhist social action held across Britain every June. Conceived by the Network of Buddhist Organisations UK (NBO) (www.nbo.org.uk), in 2015 it is expanding, and will be launched across Europe by the European Buddhist Union, of which Triratna and the NBO are members. The Triratna Development Team are very excited by BAM's potential to make connections between our ethical commitment as Buddhists and the needs of our society and our environment.

The essence of BAM is encouraging Buddhists and Buddhist Centres to take any action they wish for the benefit of others, especially actions that benefit the environment or society. The Development Team are suggesting that in 2015 we again focus on actions around Climate Change.

(Let's also take action where we can around Awakening our Money Sense, and Caring for Others. See the Suggested Actions lists and notes for many inspiring ideas in these areas, and Free Buddhist Audio's website for a host of inspiring talks on Compassion <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/search.php?q=compassion&s=0&at=audio&r=10&b=p>.)

But why could or should Buddhists take action in this way? Here are some reasons, plus suggestions for what we most distinctively have to offer others in this area...

climate change

2015 could just be the year the world gets serious about the danger of climate change. For years the world's scientists have been warning that we are on the verge of creating planet-wide runaway climate change - but the world's response has been pretty apathetic. It is becoming ever-clearer that we will have to 'go forth' from our present habit of unchecked fossil fuel exploitation: the IPCC's ['Fifth Assessment Report'](#) stated categorically that many, even most, will have to stay unmined in the ground if we are to avoid global climate disaster. Not surprisingly perhaps, we have recently started to see the emergence of more strident 'climate change deniers' in America, Canada, and the US, as vested interests become more directly threatened. Other voices urgently need to make themselves heard.

Buddhism could - or should - have a great deal to offer this debate, for instance offering its understanding that actions have consequences, its teaching that ever-increasing material consumption does not bring ever-increasing happiness, and not least, its recognition that ignorance really is wilful.

To date however, Buddhists, including Triratna Buddhists, have barely referred to the issue let alone focussed on it. But we have so much to offer...

a buddhist voice

A good place to start may be a short summary of our strengths and limitations as Buddhists:

What we're not. We aren't likely to be high up in politics, at the cutting-edge of technological developments, or at the forefront of direct action...

What we are. But we *are* committed to practicing ethics, compassion and awareness, willing and able to take personal responsibility for our actions, exemplars that a simple life equals a happy life, understanding that actions have consequences, that "with our thoughts we make the world". We're also able to recognise our own attachments and to confess and 'go forth' from them when needed. We are, potentially, remarkable exemplars of a better way to live.

dharmic perspectives

Although there may be some elements in the Buddhist consciousness that lead us to hold back (teachings on detachment, impermanence, our habit of 'retreating' etc), there is much in the Dharma encouraging us to get involved and to act with courage and active compassion. Here's a selection from the scriptures and also sound-bites from individual Order Members.

The **Karaniya Metta Sutta** encourages us to develop a heart of unbounded love "for those born and those *yet to be born...*" - so it seems that even the Buddha was encouraging us to include future generations in our metta! At present we are messing their world up...

Mokshini: We talk about **interconnectedness** but we may be failing to join the dots and realise that life on earth is subject to conditions, and these

conditions are breaking down now, this century. (Listen to Mokshini's talk *Altruism, Actually - Getting out and doing it* on Free Buddhist Audio here (<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/search.php?q=mokshini&s=0&at=audio&r=10&b=p>))

For Sahajatarā, **climate change equals suffering**. She says - "Try starting a conversation off with this question as an opener: *'If climate change equals suffering, do we as members of a faith community have a duty to try to prevent it?'*"

Nandavajra writes - "**We have the vision of creating a 'new society'** and the transformation of the world and surely that vision must address the very particular challenges that humanity is currently facing." He also says "Although I make some effort to living a 'low impact' life I also recognise the forces of indifference and indolence in me and a strong resistance to deeper practical changes. **How far am I prepared to speak up, agitate and act?'**"

Perhaps **the near-enemy of non-attachment** is detachment? A Dharmacharini recently commented: "I really loved the talks on the women's National Order Weekend, but I was very struck by how the impression was that it somehow existed in a sphere completely independent of what will be happening in the rest of society in 50 years time..." - something we can all fall into.

Claire Morris and Bec Frost (national BAM workers for the NBO in 2013 and 2014) link BAM with the **Five Precepts**:

- Loving-Kindness: purchasing eco/ethical products
- Open-Handed Generosity: giving and sharing with others
- Stillness, Simplicity and Contentment: de-cluttering
- Truthful Communication: openly campaigning, speaking truth to power
- Clear and Radiant Awareness: learning 'systems thinking' ie feedback and interconnectedness

Skilful intentions lead to skilful actions The primary suggestion in the list of suggested actions for BAM is that we, following the Quakers, commit to becoming a "sustainable, low-carbon community". This is an intention rather than a prescription: the start of a journey of exploration rather than a list of rules. The suggestion is that we collectively embark upon a journey, essentially one of ever-increasing awareness, in the faith that over time, specific skilful actions based on this awareness will become obvious and even necessary.

Awareness is revolutionary As Buddhists, we are committed to practicing "clear and radiant" awareness - and for Bhante, awareness is revolutionary. Once we have become aware that something is immoral or unethical or unskilful we have a moral duty to address it in some way. Inextricably linked to the issue of climate change is the question of sustainability, and what the world's

scientists are asking us is to become aware that our carbon-fuelled lifestyles are, from a planetary perspective, unsustainable: we simply cannot carry on as we have been.

Once we recognise that to live unsustainably is to live unethically, and that some or even many of our Western lifestyle habits (including Buddhists' lifestyle habits) are unsustainable, we are led to the realisation that some of our habits are therefore unethical. And that is likely - naturally enough - to lead us to experience a variety of resistances and attachments within ourselves. These will have quite a lot of energy and even cleverness behind them: the Dharma teaches that **ignorance is wilful!** This in turn means that skilful actions will only become possible if we incorporate quite a bit of personal humility and willingness to 'go forth' as we explore and become aware of the 'facts of the matter'.

*These notes compiled by Lokabandhu, Dec 2013
and updated by Dhammadassin, Jan 2015*

Other Buddhist voices on climate action

A number of Buddhist teachers and Sanghas are starting to speak about climate change. Two are featured below. There is also a book, 'A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency', by John Stanley /David Loy.

1. The U.S. Dharma Teachers' Climate Collaborative

In the US a group known as the U.S. Dharma Teachers' Climate Collaborative have issued as statement with 16 core Dharma principles to address Climate Change, and how Dharma practitioners can engage with it. See www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/interviews/16cdp. They say: -

The following dharma principles directly apply to the issue of climate disruption

1. **Reverence for life:** From this point forward climate disruption is the overriding context for all life on earth, including humans. What we humans do will determine what life survives and thrives and in what form and locations.
2. **Happiness stems from helping others:** Our greatest personal happiness comes when we give of ourselves and help others. For example, many people instinctually help our neighbors after a natural disaster, which indicates that altruism and the desire to help others is built unto our genes. We must grow and apply this to the marginalized among us that are at least initially hit hardest by climate disruption. This is the very opposite of the greed and self-centeredness that dominates today.
3. **We suffer when we cling:** The very nature of happiness is dependent on our capacity to give up our attachments and help others. This same principle must now be elevated and applied to public policies of all types.
4. The ethical imperative: **All beings matter.** We should act in ways that are beneficial for both self and others, acting out of a commitment to altruism and compassion for others.
5. **Interconnection and interdependence:** We must dissolve objectification of other people and nature and overcome the belief in a separate self that leads us to limit our sense of kinship. Even as we let go of the delusion of an individual self that is separate from other people, we must let go of the

delusion that humanity is separate from the rest of the biosphere. Our interdependence with the Earth means that we cannot pursue our own well-being at the cost of its well-being. When the Earth's ecosystems become sick, so do our bodies and our societies.

6. **Renunciation, simplicity:** To resolve climate disruption we must be willing to renounce attachments to things to contribute to the problem and live more simply.
7. The relationship between the First and Second Noble Truth and capacity to learn to work with difficult states: **Understanding** the suffering we have created symbolized by climate disruption and how it came about and that we can learn not to identify with it and instead work through distressing states such as fear, despair, etc.
8. **Opening to suffering as a vehicle for awakening:** The suffering caused by climate disruption provides an unprecedented opportunity for humans to learn from our individual and collective mistakes and manifest a great awakening. It is a special opportunity like never before. We can find ways to be happy—we can “tend and befriend” rather than fight (among ourselves), flee, or freeze. We can acknowledge that this is the way things are now, open to the suffering rather than becoming attached, and think and act in new ways
9. **The interconnectedness of inner and outer, the individual and the collective (or institutional):** Climate disruption provides an unprecedented opportunity to understand the roots of the problem—which relate to the ways our minds work and how those patterns become embedded in collective and collective/institutional practices and policies. This awareness can open the door to new ways of thinking and responding that will eventually produce different institutional practices and policies.
10. **Connection to diversity and justice issues:** The dharma principles and narratives must also apply to issues of diversity and social inclusion and justice. The beliefs in separateness etc that has produced the climate crisis also leads to social inequity and exclusion. People of color and other marginalized groups must be included.
11. **Buddhism as a social change agent:** The principles of Buddhism help us engage with life, not remove ourselves from it. The Buddha was actively engaged with his social and cultural contexts and for Buddhism to have relevance today it must help people understand how to engage in today's political and social contexts.
12. **Adhitthana or Determination:** We are called to develop resolve, determination, and heroic effort now. We must have the courage to realize that we are being called to engage in this issue and that living the dharma will see us through the hard times.
13. **This precious human birth is an opportunity:** We must always remember that it is a rare and precious thing to be born as a human and we have been given a rare opportunity to act as stewards because humans are not only the source of destruction—we are also the source of great goodness.
14. **Love is the greatest motivator:** Our deepest and most powerful action comes out of love: of this Earth, of each other. The more people can connect with and feel love for the Earth, the greater the likelihood that their hearts will be moved to help prevent harm. Children should therefore be a top priority. Need to help people realize what they love about life and what will be lost as climate disruption increases.

15. **The sangha—and other forms of social support—are essential:** The reality of climate disruption is a profound shock to many people and the only way to minimize or prevent fight, flight, freeze responses is to be supported by and work with others so people will not feel alone, can overcome despair, and develop solutions together. We need to go through this journey together, sharing our difficult reactions and positive experiences in groups and communities.
16. **The Bodhisattva:** The figure of the Bodhisattva which is a unifying image of someone who is dedicated to cultivating the inner depths and to helping others, is an inspiring figure for our times.

Buddhism and the Climate-Energy Emergency

The website www.ecobuddhism.org contains many excellent articles. One is a powerful editorial addressing Buddhism and the Climate-Energy Emergency. They write:

It is in this way that we must train ourselves: by liberation of the self through love. We will develop love, we will practice it, we will make it both a way and a basis, take our stand upon it, store it up, and thoroughly set it going.

The Buddha, *Samyutta Nikaya*

Environmental and social breakdown is now vast and global in scale. Technological advances have provided the basis for a new kind of social evolution, beyond cultural, religious or spiritual boundaries. Technology, however, is not ultimately directed by reason, but by internal forces of sociobiology and psychology. Human instincts have destructive as well as benign aspects. As much as we may celebrate our art, scientific knowledge or altruism, we can no longer ignore the truth that we are also 'the most dangerous animal'. [1]

Humans are opportunistic, as are all higher animals, and characteristically greedy. Our high intelligence confers the capacity to manipulate others to accumulate power or resources. We are quite easily trained into violent forms of aggression. Now that we have 'accidentally' acquired the capacity to destroy the climate of this planet, what will we call upon to restrain ourselves in time?

Technological prowess alone cannot confer contentment or happiness on us: in 'advanced' societies, the rates of anxiety, stress and mental illness are greater than ever previously recorded. [2] On a physical level too, cancer, cardiovascular disease, inflammatory and auto-immune disease as well as diverse 'functional illnesses' have become epidemic. [3] What will our governments, corporations and politicians now do with the power of life or death over the biosphere from which our species evolved?

Do politicians even understand the scientific facts? Are they as attentive to their citizens and future human generations as they are to the most profitable corporate special interest in commercial history, the fossil fuel industry? The answer to these questions will determine the course of the Sixth Great Extinction

in Earth history, which is now unfolding. It could even provoke the end of an era of geological time [4]—or as Buddhists would say, the end of an aeon:

The poison of global warming due to the harnessing of machines in all places and times,

Is causing the existing snow mountains to melt,

And the oceans will consequently bring the world within reach of the aeon's end.

Grant your blessings that the world may be protected from these conditions!

Kyabje Sakya Trizin Rinpoche

For a Future to Be Possible

Sustainable development meets the requirements of the present, without damaging the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A long-term view is essential, in the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, *for a future to be possible* [5]. Human beings are very much more than economic units. The assumption that progress is the creation of ever more wealth and possessions is a documented cause of anxiety and mental illness. [2]

For a consumer society, *having* rather than *well-being* is the *raison d'être*. It is powered by polluting energy sources and guided by a pseudo-scientific principle of limitless economic growth. Both these factors are antipathetic to basic laws of biology. We imagine our society as an environment above and beyond the rest of the living world. The truth, as former senior economist at the World Bank, Professor Herman Daly states, is otherwise:

The larger system is the biosphere and the subsystem is the economy. The economy is geared for growth, whereas the parent system doesn't grow. It remains the same size. So as the economy grows, it encroaches upon the biosphere, and this is its fundamental cost.

Scientists consider that a 'top predator' like *Homo sapiens* relies on the whole pyramid of biological life beneath it. Therefore the destruction of whole ecosystems is suicidal for our species. For Mahayana Buddhism, which sees all life as interdependent, driving other species to extinction is unmistakably harming ourselves and our own destiny.

If we ask why our social evolution has become so maladaptive, we come immediately upon the key influence of mass advertising. From an early age, we are bombarded by powerful imagery, deployed through a hypnotic medium, television, that bypasses conscious filters to directly influence our subconscious mind. The vivid imagery of television and movies create a seamless virtual reality that programs our collective nervous system. From America to China, consumerism has become an organizing principle for billions of peoples' lives. Zen Buddhist philosopher David R. Loy states:

Consumerism requires and develops a sense of our own impoverishment. By manipulating the gnawing sense of lack that haunts our insecure sense of self, the *attention economy* insinuates its basic message deep into our awareness: the solution to any discomfort we might have is consumption. Needless to say, this all-pervasive conditioning is incompatible with the liberative path of Buddhism. [6]

Consumption has replaced religion and citizenship as the way we participate in society. It is one of 4 Megaphenomena that have 'spiked' in intensity over the last century, combining to create unprecedented danger for the biosphere. Population growth, carbon gas emissions and species extinctions are the other three megaphenomena.

Fossil fuels will be exhausted within this century. The production of oil, the most valuable and versatile fossil fuel, seems already to have peaked. This is happening just as increased summer melting of the Arctic pack-ice moves us towards the first predicted 'tipping point' in a climate crisis. We have entered upon the period of *climate-energy emergency*.

How can Buddhism help?

One day during meditation, I was contemplating global warming....

With some anguish, I asked Nature this question: 'Nature, do you think we can rely on you?' I asked the question because I know that Nature is intelligent, she knows how to react, sometimes violently, to re-establish balance. And I heard the answer in the form of another question: 'Can I rely on you?' The question was being put back to me: can Nature rely on humans? And after long, deep breathing, I said 'Yes, you can mostly rely on me.' And then I heard Nature's answer, 'Yes, you can also mostly rely on me.' That was a very deep conversation I had with Nature.

This should not be a mere verbal declaration. It should be a deep commitment from everyone, so that Nature can respond in kind. With collective insight we can reconcile with and heal our planet. Each of us can do something in our own daily lives to contribute, to ensure that a future is possible for the next generation.

Thich Nhat Hanh [5]

Buddhism has powerful cultural assets. It has long-established contemplative methods and ethical teachings, the weight of traditional religious communities, moral authority and the potential political power of millions of adherents. Altogether, the world's 376 million Buddhists comprise 6% of religious adherents. Above all, Buddhism is based on the recognition of *interdependence*.

Interdependence is the spiritual truth that biologists have independently discovered through the scientific discipline of ecology. Whether we like it or not, we have entered the century of the environment, of ecological reality. In this century, then, Buddhism has a special destiny.

In the 10 countries where Buddhists are a majority, they can exert a major influence on government policy. In Bhutan, for example, Buddhist principles have replaced the limiting economic concept of GDP by that of 'gross national happiness'. Exemplary forest protection laws have been put in place. In the 'advanced' societies of Europe and the U.S., Buddhism has been embraced by many people searching for effective spiritual practice in an environment of consumerism and nihilism. Nobel Peace Awards to the Dalai Lama (1989) and Aung San Suu Kyi (1991) have brought about widespread recognition of Buddhist leadership in non-violent progressive values.

There has never been a more important time in history to organize all Buddhist resources systematically, on behalf of sentient beings. There has never been a time when communication systems make this as possible as they do now. Buddhist spiritual power could create examples of change that influence the whole world.

Unleashing that power, however, requires religious people to bring their values to the public square ... to leave one's values at home is to assent to the status quo of excessive individualism, consumerism, commodification of myriad aspects of life, environmental decline, and the absence of strong communities. The religious community's gift - to articulate the ethical and spiritual dimensions of modern issues - is indispensable to full public discussion of the pressing challenges of our day, and to developing a new understanding of human progress in the 21st century. [7]

Many Buddhist public events, rituals and projects are dedicated to world peace. However, environmental catastrophes, climate destruction, and struggles over fossil fuels are making world peace impossible. According to the U.N., 60 nations, mainly in the Third World, will see tensions amplified by ever-scarcer resources. Global warming could flood the great rice-growing deltas of Asia through rising sea levels, and bring about the disappearance of Himalayan glaciers in Tibet, abolishing the water supply of hundreds of millions of people. Even countries not directly affected by environmental disasters could be flooded by millions of refugees. These are very practical matters for the survival of Buddhism in Asia, as well as for world peace.

In summary, the climate-energy emergency is so consequential as to be a moral and ethical matter of the first order. The case can be made that a pan-Buddhist Council should be convened to address it. One aim would be to discuss the full facts with scientists and consider the multi-dimensional implications of the crisis. We should arrive at an unambiguous common position on protection of the climate and the living world, an inspiration to all people of good heart.

If it is reasonable action which is by nature beneficial to truth and justice, then by abandoning procrastination and discouragement, the more you encounter obstruction, the more you should strengthen your courage and make effort. That is the conduct of a wise and good person.

Dalai Lama XIV [8]

By the end of this century, the Earth could lose up to half its species. These extinctions will alter not only biological diversity but also the evolutionary process itself. General ignorance, indifference or deceit about this mass extinction endangers our own species too. Modern man emerged from archaic human species about 200,000 years ago. We were initially one of three human species on Earth—the others, *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis* became extinct. We have survived and come to dominate the whole planet. Ninety nine percent of all the species that have ever lived have become extinct, and we too could make ourselves extinct through runaway global warming.

You see, one day we might find all living things on this planet—including human beings—are doomed.

We still have a brief window of opportunity to ensure the continuity of many varied and beautiful forms of life on Earth, including our own. So we find ourselves living through the most momentous of times. In this section you can find the views, advice and aspirations of noted and authentic Buddhist teachers— *A Buddhist Response to Global Warming*. The many species that constitute the living world have no voice to ask for our compassion, wisdom and leadership. Please participate in ‘breaking the silence’:

There comes a time in all of our lives when silence is a betrayal. [10]

- [1] D. Livingstone Smith [2007] *The Most Dangerous Animal*
- [2] O. James [2008] *The Selfish Capitalist*
- [3] W. Meggs [2003] *The Inflammation Cure*
- [4] M. Lynas [2007] *Six Degrees—Our Future on a Hotter Planet*
- [5] Thich Nhat Hanh [2007] *The Art of Power*
- [6] D. R. Loy [2008] *Consciousness Commodified: The Attention-Deficit Society* (Tikkun)
- [7] G. Gardner [2006] *Inspiring Progress*
- [8] T. Laird [2006] *The Story of Tibet – Conversations with the Dalai Lama*
- [9] Dalai Lama XIV [1992] *Address at the Rio Earth Summit*
- [10] Statement by Martin Luther King

Last but not least...

"We are still accepting a cultural value that annihilates the Earth. If we don't change, we are going to our own extinction. This is precisely what addicts do."

Depth psychologist Marion Woodman in an interview available [here](#)