

*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 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.

Dalai Lama XIV [9]

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

Source: [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/editorials/buddhism\\_and\\_the\\_climate\\_energy\\_emergency/](http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/editorials/buddhism_and_the_climate_energy_emergency/)