

Perceiving the World as Self

Continued from previous page

tributing material resources. It will be easy to cherish that which we are intimate with.

How do you perceive the natural world? How do you define your needs in relation to the needs of the planet? For me, addressing these questions is possible only as I become more

aware that human needs are the same as planetary needs. To paraphrase the Buddhist poet Gary Snyder, the great challenge of my life has become learning to “walk lightly upon the earth.”

Ames Colt works and studies in the Environmental Science program at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. He is a member of the Cambridge Zen Center. □

Pine Forest Teachings

Bringing joy and compassion to the environmental wars

By Anne Rudloe

The four ancient elements are still the best way to describe the natural world as we see it and live in it.

- Earth: prairie, forest, desert, mountain.
- Water: flowing springs, rivers, ocean.
- Air: morning calm, hurricanes, weather.
- Fire: the sun that gives it all energy and motion.

Life arises from these four together. Individuals by the billions flash on and off, like fireflies in the night. These impermanent beings make up a continuum — the flowing life force that has shaped the planet for countless millions of years. This life shares the power and essence of the four elements. So a butterfly fluttering across the coastal dunes is as powerful as a mountain; it contains all life's strength within its small vast self.

Today we wonder what will become of our Earth and all its life. We struggle to protect it from pollution, development, and waste. But to act effectively we must first understand our relationship to this life. And to continue the struggle over time, we must learn to act with compassion and joy. Anger and desperation may produce energy for a while, but over the long term it takes the joy out of life, draining our strength in the process. Once we learn to act with joy, we will be stronger, more energetic, and therefore more effective.

How can we gain this understanding, compassion, and joy? In the Orient, Zen practice and the way of the warrior have a long traditional relationship. The idea is to be as clear as cut glass and just as dangerous. Zen is equally useful for those whose modern Warrior Way is the way of the Earth. Traditional warriors and today's environmental activists each require certain things: high energy; the ability to make personal security a secondary rather than a primary goal; and the ability to continue over time through defeats as well as victories. These qualities often arise spontaneously out of Zen practice as we gain insight into the living universe and how we fit into it.

A good way to learn about this living world is to practice outdoors as much as possible. In Zen temple practice the master is a very formal figure surrounded by certain barriers



Anne Rudloe (in cowboy hat) teaching a university class in a Florida salt marsh.

that inhibit access. The barriers preserve an essential space, keeping the student from confusing the teacher of reality with the whole of reality; they also test whether the student has the clarity and strength to knock them down. But if a human teacher is formal, how much more formal is the teaching of a tree in the wind, or light flashing on water? It manifests reality in every moment with its total being, with no wanting anything and no way for our individual egos to get involved.

Understanding our relationship to the planet, and acting out of love and compassion to protect and restore it, are the only defenses against burnout and despair. But sometimes this is easier to say than to do. For example, a while back I faced a series of environmental setbacks over two days, one on top of the other. Whatever clarity or calm I thought I achieved vanished into frustration.

I fled to a nearby longleaf pine forest. These forests, which once dominated the Southeastern coastal plains, have been largely destroyed by logging and other human activities, and their native species have been relegated to the endangered list. On this day the tree trunks were black in the distance against a wall of green pine needles. The open forest glowed blue,

yellow, and green, with straight black trunks anchoring the light. A breeze passed and leaves sparkled.

As I sat in that ancient place, things slowly came back into perspective. I was upset because I did not want a particular marina built in a pristine sea grass meadow. But given the sweep of ecological time and the global impact of humanity, no one person can save or lose the planet. Even if I lost the fight against the marina, the planet would still resolve those issues in its own way. To think otherwise was simply an ego trip.

Two days before I had come to the same spot on horseback. The sunset had glowed and everything had been luminous. This time I was about an hour earlier, and the light was not quite so vibrant. I sat on the ground in a bed of flowers, with green shrubs and pink meadow beauties rising above my eye level. The forest looked totally different than it had looked from the back of a horse; just a few feet totally changed the world.

Eventually the sound of the wind in the pines became the flow of time, the voice of reality moving like a river. It's always there, always flowing. We usually don't notice it beneath the clutter of commitments and daily schedules, but it's always there. Sometimes we clear away the distractions and discover it.

This place was forest. Other places are buildings, offices, kitchens, roads — all the human culture that has replaced this original fabric that still gives us life, push it back though we will. While I sat in the forest, other people were sitting in meetings, doing reports, buying and selling, designing and building — generally doing "adult" things. WHAT was going on here? Whatever was happening in that little piece of pine forest, with its sunlight and insects, its fox squirrels and flowers, is what this planet has always been about. With that perspective, the fear, anger, and tension disappeared and I could relax. I came back and after a year-long fight won the marina battle after all.

But such battles are endless. The only way to keep going is to wage them with joy, with understanding of one's true role, and most of all with compassion for those on the opposite side, since there really is no opposite side. The goal isn't just to win the battle. The goal is to understand what is really going on in this little piece of time and space. In order to save the endangered wood stork or snow leopard, we must first understand our correct relationship to it. And everything that arises teaches that relationship if we just pay attention.

Anne Rudloe is a marine biologist and environmental activist. She sits with the Cypress Tree sangha in Tallahassee, Florida. □

Satellite Eyes and Chemical Noses

By Jan Sendzimir



Action

If every creature were visible to us it would be no mystery that life is suffering. Inhale and we kill countless microscopic beings; exhale and we pollute our world. Zen's gift is an incisive questioning that cuts to original awareness. If we address pollution as a reflection of suffering, we go to the root cause: hunger.

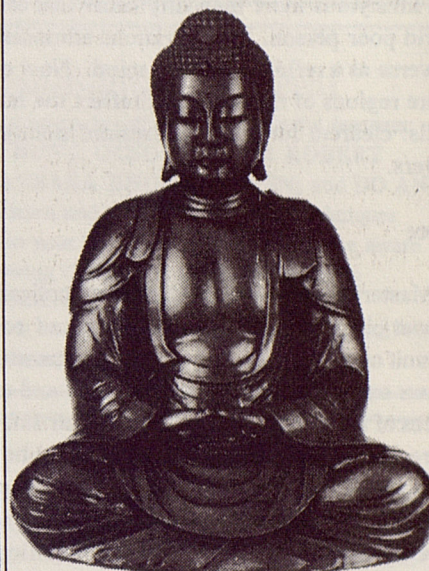
Continued on next page

Inflatable Zafu

Actually an inflatable beachball inside a fine quality zafu cover. It's lightweight, convenient, and guaranteed. Colors: Plum, Burgundy, Navy Blue, Royal Blue, Black, and Green. Cost: \$18.00 Freight-Paid. Free brochure on this and traditional meditation cushions.

Carolina Morning Designs
Dept. P, Box 31-B, Hot Springs, NC 28743
(704) 622-7329

BUDDHIST MEDITATION SUPPLIES



RETAIL & WHOLESALE

Statues • Cushions • Benches
Bells & Gongs • Altar Supplies
Incense • Scrolls • Books & Tapes
Rosaries • Posters • Jewelry

For a fully illustrated and annotated
41-page CATALOG, send \$1.00 to:

SHASTA ABBEY BUDDHIST SUPPLIES

Dept. P, P.O. Box 199,
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067
(916) 926-4208