

## Satellite Eyes and Chemical Noses

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But as "Zen Buddhists" we may only see the hunger of temple visitors. It's time to recognize that our footprints are all over the planet; the game is global.

One example: destruction of rain forests in the Amazon. Severe freezes in Florida set up such an orange grove planting boom in Brazil that landlords evicted thousands of tenants in order to plant trees. Those evicted joined hundreds of thousands of poor people desperate for food, so desperate they try slash-and-burn agriculture in the rain forests.

Zen practice provides an answer that precedes ecological evidence: cut consumption. The hunger of our lifestyles is a source of destruction worldwide, as evidenced in Brazil. Paul Ehrlich, the eminent ecologist, points out that the environmental destruction needed to support a normal North American lifestyle is more than fifty times that of the average third world poor person. Zen patriarchs admonished us to see the universe as a reflection of our mind. Now ecologists can cite entire regions of the earth that reflect the hunger of shopping malls: clearcut forests, soil erosion, shantytowns with open sewers.

### Place

Mastering our sense of place has implications for all of us. A poet observed that the most profound ecological act is to commit oneself to live in one place, to come to rest, so that one knows one's own home, where smells and uses of plants and voices of animals are familiar, as is their suffering. If we stay, we realize how we paper the walls of our home with our own karma. We create our environment. How can we not care?

Our view of home has to expand, and our thinking may have to expand to include initial sacrifice on the road to healing. For example: In Poland, a project explores the use of a swamp to soak up lead and zinc that flow out of a mine's waste water. Biologists and naturalists have called the idea criminal. But add up all the pollution generated if a treatment plant were constructed: pollution would not be confined to one swamp, as in the experiment. Coal mines, steel mills, power plants and other factories powering such a clean-up would be causing pollution. The range of our vision has to grow past the swamp, past our sense of time.

### Dynamics

The average North American family moves every seven years. How can we learn the rhythm of a flood or drought cycle when each stanza comes but once a decade? Odorless and colorless, carbon dioxide and methane have been mounting for decades, and as the greenhouse heats up, who has the patience to recognize a wave that crests once a century?

Awakening to the beat of our compassionate heart in Zen

practice is miracle enough. And this may be one path effective enough to let fall the lifestyle which bleeds the rest of the planet. But our responsibilities are even wider. The changes are swifter and more all-encompassing than the five senses can grasp. We need satellite eyes and chemical noses on balloons and anchors all over the planet.

To recognize waves of change, one needs a flexible view. But whether trying to follow ripples on the pond of Mind or the swelling of atmospheric warming, students of Zen or ecology face a common enemy: certainty. A deep religious conviction, born of grappling with a profound question, unmistakably recognizes the stink of certainty. An old saying goes: "Even a true statement will stake a donkey to one spot for ten thousand years."

Certainty surfaces as a deadly tendency among environmentalists: a death-grip belief in a halcyon, natural world in perfect balance. This is a mirror image of how industrialists see nature: a world in equilibrium, a balance so powerful that it always rights itself. By their view, no matter how much pollution is poured into the sea, it will always absorb it, and be ready and willing to deliver more natural wealth. How often does one find combatants who resemble each other so much

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## POETRY

*When listening  
for the hills*

*No ought  
or should  
in their standing  
or your sitting  
Their murmur is obvious.*

*Why weep  
over our mortal  
fleeting  
against the slow  
sweep  
of mountains  
dancing?*

*What other flesh  
can flip this  
grief  
into the joyful shout  
of  
100  
years?*

*Jan Sendzimir  
Utah, 1986*