

# Green Dharma Workshop for Dharma Teachers

Igor Piniński JDPSN

The motto for the workshop was one of the five basic points of our ethics policy: “Respect the planet and the web of life upon which all beings depend.”

I started with this line and asked people what is our direction. Everybody of course replied “How may I help you?” Then I asked them to imagine that they are meeting a nonhuman sentient being living on this planet, the first one that appears in their mind, and they ask this being “How may I help you?” And let’s imagine that this being can understand and give an answer. What would that answer be? Most people said “Go away,” “Disappear,” or something like that.

Next step was to ask people why they answered like this. They were giving examples of how humans harm the environment: heating the atmosphere, pollution, plastic in the oceans, destroying ecosystems and habitats, genocide of species, and so on.

Then I asked them what can we do? What can we do as dharma practitioners, dharma teachers and leaders of Zen centers and groups? I reminded them about the dharma teachers’ compact, which says that we should be “silent examples of practice.” Most people said, first of all, that we should reduce our negative impact on the environment. I asked them if it is possible to reduce our individual negative impact to zero, or even make it positive, and nobody could see such a possibility.

So for the next step, I shared with them my own experience with this matter, focusing on my influence on the global heating situation. I referred to Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching: clear situation, clear relationship, proper function. I also talked about the rule: when you take something, you must give back; when you cause damage, you must repair it. So knowing that there is too much carbon dioxide in the air, I cannot produce more if I can’t remove it. So, to paraphrase the teaching “A day without work is a day without food”: A day without reducing CO<sub>2</sub> must be a day without producing it.

Then I presented the calculation of my annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: car, flights, electricity, food, and other goods and services. I talked about how I try to bring it to a minimum in all areas where it’s reasonable.

Then I presented my way of reducing CO<sub>2</sub>, my individual reforestation project, which I’ve been working on for the last thirty years. I gave the basic details: how many trees; how much CO<sub>2</sub> they’ve absorbed and stored so far; what is my estimation for the next twenty years; what kind of trees I’ve planted; which trees are most efficient in CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, but also the longest living, adaptable to climate change, and drought resistant. I also talked about how I take care of biodiversity, so the forest is a habitat for many different forms of life, especially bees and similar insects. And perhaps most important, I talked about about the joy

I take in planting these trees and living in this forest.

There are at least three times more trees in my village than in other nearby villages, and I have never had a single conversation about it with my neighbors. The neighbor next to me decided to cover half of his property with forest ten years after I started doing it. At the moment, my forest is not the biggest one in the area. Thirty years ago there were none, except for national forests.

This project offsets my greenhouse gas emissions three times over at the moment, but it’s not the only thing I do. I also buy Certified Emission Reduction units (CERs) from the UN Carbon Offset Platform ([offset.climateneutralnow.org](http://offset.climateneutralnow.org)), which is co-funding greenhouse gas reduction projects in developing countries. The CERs are cheap so I cover my greenhouse gas emissions five times over and it doesn’t hurt my budget at all.

Then I talked briefly about my personal waste and water management, which is based on the same rule.

Finishing my sharing, I said that it’s not something to copy and paste into everybody’s life. I believe in the middle way, which is taking care of our own needs and the needs of all other beings equally. My way of doing it is rooted in my personal situation, my lifestyle that works best for me, and my personal relationship with the world around me. Everybody has to find their own middle way and their own way of living responsibly.

I also said that I personally find focusing on my own life and how I can be of no burden to the environment more efficient than fighting and arguing with people with a different attitude. I also find it more in line with the teaching of our school.

The next point was to have been working in groups on the question “How can I find the middle way in my own life?” but my time was finishing, so I had to skip this point and go to the next one, which was working in groups on the question “How can our wish to respect the planet and the web of life upon which all beings depend be implemented into our Zen centers and groups?” And this point concluded the workshop.

As a result, people have started talking about changes in their Zen centers and groups. Wu Bong Sa Temple near Warsaw is now thinking about increasing the number of trees on their grounds; they are checking the possibility of covering the roofs of the buildings with solar panels; they also have an idea of adding a voluntary climate fee to the price of the retreats and using that to purchase CERs. And in the Łódź Zen Center we are working on implementing a zero emissions, zero waste, and zero wastewater policy. Along these lines, we are beginning to explore a project for promoting forestry on our temple grounds called “The Original Buddha Temples Project.” A description can be found at [originalbuddhatemple.org](http://originalbuddhatemple.org). ♦