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BUDDHISM, ECO-SPIRITUALITY AND THE RELIGIONS

We are fortunate in this issue to be able to offer a creative, informative study of Buddhism and its relevance for ecological thought and spirituality. Brian Brown presents us with both a scholarly reading of Buddhist history and sources and an ecospiritual framework for understanding all religions. Religious traditions, claims Dr. Brown, "must be interpreted as the self-articulation of a planetary consciousness, the earth a sacred presence to and of the Absolute" (p. 4).

All religious traditions are called upon today to enter into "a genuinely planetary context ... to discover a common global concern that will creatively sustain future mutual dialogue" (p. 2). The desecration of the earth provides that common concern and raises questions that are fundamental to all traditions. Entering this global situation from the depths of their own traditions will transform and renew the religions' contact with the sacred as well as make them effective agents in redirecting the energies of human civilization.

Guiding Brown's vision is an organic model of an evolving diversity-within-unity. The various religious traditions, like so many organs, have historically established separate identities but must now, for their own continued vitality, shape a common body. This common life to whose welfare they will contribute and from which they receive a new vitality and meaning must be integral with the earth process. The various traditions must realize that it was the earth process itself that expressed its own spiritual riches in and through them and that now calls them to a new stage of differentiated unity and a new level of spiritual development.

Buddhism, having been involved in a long meditation on "the processes and significance of the phenomenal world", (p. 2) will achieve a new understanding of its own teachings on the interrelatedness and "conditioned-co-production" of all beings, including humans. The human, for Buddhism, has a special role to play in this phenomenal world but not that of manipulator or exploiter. Rather, the human must come to realize itself as that "faculty through which the universe in all its variety is self-disclosed as the cosmic extension of the absolute" and through which the absolute comes to know itself "as the originative source and ultimate nature of that very universe" (p. 7). Dr. Brown's interpretive framework is seen, finally, to owe a lot to Buddhism itself, as well as to Brown's mentor, Thomas Berry.

-- Don St. John

BUDDHISM AND THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Brian Brown

Up to the present time, one of the most difficult problems to genuine mutual understanding in trans-cultural religious dialogue has been that of context. Each tradition, while remaining faithful to its own unique articulation of reality has, at the same time, to exercise sensitive care against a distorted reception of the other's equally unique world view. Undoubtedly, it is neither possible nor desirable to assume the stance of the *tabula rasa* (the mind as a clean slate) and to simply bracket one's own intellectual and spiritual heritage. The history of the transmission of ideas from one culture to another attests to the marvelously creative syntheses which have evolved from the active translation and assimilation of novel thought into a native consciousness.

The twentieth century has clearly witnessed to a dramatic mutual interest in and dialogue among global religious traditions. Enormous strides have been made to distance the age of reciprocal indifference and/or open hostility among adherents of different beliefs. Yet there are equally clear indications of popular retrenchment in fundamentalistic and literal interpretation of and devotion to one's own sectarian persuasion. In the face of an increasing secularity and base materialism, the value of such a trend might be defended with forceful conviction. Nevertheless, a return to rigid denominationalism threatens us not only with a regressive fragmentation in human global discourse, but signals the eclipse of those very religious traditions that revert to such narrow parochialism.

In the earlier stages of earth history, the multiple expressions of human spirituality which dramatically determined entire cultural patterns, developed and flourished as effulgent manifestations of the earth's own interiority and as multiple responses to the Mystery that called it into being as one organism.

The distinctive doctrines and scholastic elaborations, ritual enactments and symbolic representations of these traditions were the differentiating phases

of the earth's own groping self-identity as a planetary presence of and to the Absolute. The earth is a living psychic process; thus the profound subjectivity animating and sustaining these more articulately conscious expressions of human religious traditions. Therefore, any insistence by any of the earth's religious traditions on entrenching itself within the limited context of its own geographic-cultural sphere of influence could have tragic consequences.

For, if, in the earlier stages of their history it was a natural and spontaneous process of earth development for human religious traditions to explicitate their own unique understanding of reality, it is now no less natural and much more imperative for them to enter the next phase of their growth, in correlation with the evolutionary dynamics of the earth. To assume a genuinely planetary context, albeit from the inner resources of their own unique intuitions, will be to discover a common global concern that will creatively sustain their future mutual dialogue. This planetary context will allow them to evoke again from their own distinctive heritages, symbolic expressions of and revelatory encounters with the sacred, and thus, to renew their psychic-spiritual energy. Finally, to adopt a planetary context will represent a faithful response to the organic biosphere that is earth, presently imperiled for want of adequate defense from the very religious witnesses that should be testifying to its inherent sacrality. Undoubtedly one of the crucial factors in the planet's contemporary degradation by technological profiteering is the failure of human religious traditions to elaborate an ecological philosophy, spirituality, and ethic that would not only forcefully convict such behavior, but would persuasively educate human consciousness against its very conception.

The tradition of the Buddha, from its earliest inception to its later highly sophisticated refinements, demonstrates a singular concern for the processes and significance of the phenomenal world. The following study will identify and elucidate this continuous pattern of Buddhist reflection out of which emerges an ecological cosmology in which the reality of each thing mutually participates in and

depends upon every other thing. The intuition which creatively sustained the consistent focus for the development of so comprehensive a vision across the diversity of Buddhist thought and practice has been succinctly phrased in the original Pali term, *Paticcasamuppada*. This is often translated as "conditioned co-production" or "dependent origination." But a more literal rendition, "the-together-rising-up-of-things," better conveys the notions that the appearing and standing forth into being, the existence, of any particular thing is a dynamic collaborative process of many other things. No thing exists in and of itself, but only as a context of relations, a nexus of factors whose peculiar concatenation alone determines the origin, perpetuation or cessation of that thing. A line from the Pali canon, revered by all the schools of the Buddhist tradition as an original statement of the Enlightened Founder himself, pithily formulates the fluid contingency which is the very nature of the phenomenal world:

*Imasmim sati idam hoti; imassa
uppada idam uppajjati;
imasmim asati, idam na hoti;
imassa nirodha, idam nirujjhati.*

This being, that becomes, from the arising of this, that arises; this not becoming, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.

In such a universe, any element is the combined shape and apparent form of a specific number of other elements. Its identity can only be defined as the expressive manifestation or the conditioned representation of those other elements. The phenomenal world of persons and things is here interpreted as so many clusters, groupings, or literally "heaps" (*skandhas*) of five basic psycho-physical elements. *Rupa* or material form, is the first and included the four primary elements of earth, water, fire, and air, as well as the five sense organs and their respective sense objects. The second is *vedana* representing feelings, while the third, *samjna*, refers to all possibilities of perceptual experience. The fourth cluster, *samskara*, includes all good, bad, or indifferent dispositions,

tendencies, volitions, strivings, impulses and emotions. Finally, the fifth basic element is *vijnana*, or consciousness, as either pure awareness or the process of ideation and thought.

In the light of our purpose to delineate the value of Buddhist thought to contemporary ecological concerns, two points might be noted thus far. First, there is the insistence by the Buddha himself and the Abhidharma schools of his followers that existence is a thoroughly contextual process: no person or thing is an independent, self-subsisting reality, but comes into being, persists, and de-ceases as a given function of other factors. To understand that life perdures only as a complex aggregation of multiple conditions is to indict modern technological-industrial pragmatism. The dictum of the Buddha, "...from the arising of this, that arises...from the ceasing of this, that ceases," assumes a dire cogency when applied to a mentality entranced by technical power and heedless of the consequence of its destructive actions in a biosphere where all life-forms are interrelated.

The second lesson to be drawn is based on the Buddhist critique of the notion of ego as the discrete, self-consistent, self-individuating and self-directing center and end of all human activity. This supposedly unique and abiding personal identity is merely a concept superimposed upon what really is only a composite derivative of those five "heaps." The central issue in the excoriation of the belief in one's personal autonomy lay in the Buddhist conviction of it as the origin of all misery and sorrow.

The act of accepting one's self as a center of ultimate significance initiates a process of differentiation: identity as this unique "I" is only possible by setting oneself over and against other persons and things. Once entrenched, the ego identity maintains a two-fold momentum vis-a-vis those persons and things from which it considers itself essentially distinct. On the one hand, perpetual self-aggrandizement through the possession of, and control over, its world becomes a thirst that suffers with every frustration and craves more with every satisfaction. On the other hand, the ego's

inherent desire for self-perpetuation drives it farther from a recognition and acceptance of the organic processes out of which its composite nature is derived, by which it is sustained and to which it will return.

A contemporary Buddhist assessment of human domination and manipulation of the environment rests upon this notion of the ego. In its awesome application of rational thought to technical expertise, the human collectivity has realized a new level of self-differentiation. If on the individual level the human being identifies itself as an autonomous center of self-given reality, and thus, as essentially different from all others, a more profound alienation has recently taken place on the level of species. In the process of self-definition, one not only perceives oneself as an autonomous personality but implicitly as a *human* personality. Today, scientific rationale has so informed the modern mind that inherent in every ego image is the notion of one's identity as *homo erectus*, *homo sapiens*, or *homo faber* (the human as upright, the human as knower, the human as maker). With each qualification the human species has increasingly determined itself as a distinct entity, transcendent to rather than shaped by and participating in the planetary processes of the biosphere.

The Buddhist tradition traced a direct causal link between human sorrow and suffering and the failure to recognize oneself as a dynamic process of many contributing factors. This analysis is no less trenchant when applied to contemporary humanity as a whole. Allured by its technological achievements, the human species has been seduced by its own power of craft into a belief of self-autonomy. In an idealized future it would perceive itself and its security as completely independent of what it deems the uncertainties of merely organic processes, capable of subsisting in artificially constructed space colonies or in vast urban centers protected from the ambiguities of nature by a total control over them.

Although indifferent to the insight that it "rises up" with the collaborative effort of the entire biosphere, the human species is no independent center unto itself; it has no *svabhava* or

self-subsistent nature of its own, for while it is unique, that uniqueness is entirely derived from the planet. This species, so enamored of itself, has forgotten that it is a peculiar configuration of the earth which shaped and sustains it. Forgetting of its own conditionality accounts, on the one hand, for the devastating drive of humanity to dominate, possess, and manipulate the natural world. On the other, it is the root cause of a malaise pervasive in modern society--an unfocused anxiety, a loss of enthusiasm, and a general experience of life as a weary process of woeful struggle--an updated social version of the classical Buddhist concept of *dukkha*, suffering. With every accomplishment of its applied techniques, the human species repudiated the organic conditions which had determined its evolutionary emergence and arrogated an entrepreneurial stance towards the natural world as an entity essentially distinct from itself. This stance allowed for an objectivity which further promoted the advance of technique, and simultaneously aggravated the alienation that sickens the modern spirit.

If there be a cogency to this Buddhist diagnosis of contemporary humanity's estranged disaffection from and despoilation of the planetary environment, its prescribed treatment may be no less germane. The Buddha's antidote to the disease of craving desire and the attendant suffering evoked by a belief in the autonomy of the ego was the Noble Eightfold Path. It consisted of right views, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Central to all its aspects and explicit in three of them (right views, mindfulness, and concentration) is the concern for correct perception: to see reality as it is.

One of the most influential scholastic Buddhist commentaries, exhaustively detailing the types and methods of meditational praxis through which Buddhists realized that perceptual goal, is the *Vissudhimagga* or *Path of Purification* by the fifth century monk, Buddhaghosa. From any perspective, it remains a classic of human psychology. But viewed from the present interest in the development of a Buddhist ecological philosophy and spirituality,

those teachings which might appear only as exotic and bizarre elements of a foreign culture, assume a new dimension. Specifically, there are innumerable references to, and precise instructions for, meditations on the inevitability and experience of old age, sickness and death; on the sub-division of the human body into 32 parts, each with a specific function and relationship to others; meditation on varieties of physical decomposition and decay; on the minute details of breathing and eating; and a comprehensive correlation of each of the 32 parts of the body with one of the four primary elements of air, earth, fire and water.

Whether the meditation involves the macabre concentration upon a bloated and festering corpse or upon the more refined attention to the in-flow and out-flow of breath, all such exercises share a common purpose: to see reality as it is. That is, to see it as a realm in which nothing arises and stands forth into being of its own power, but whose origin and persistence is a function of factors which are themselves products of other factors. To smash the illusion of a world populated by autonomous entities, extraneous and unrelated, the Buddhist tradition relentlessly focused on the contextual nature of reality, exposing the component parts, or the heap of relations that alone give a thing its identity.

As indicated above, Buddhism, as all other religious traditions, must be interpreted as the self-articulation of a planetary consciousness, the earth as a sacred presence to and of the Absolute. If that be so, then the intensive psychic energy of Hinayana Buddhism assumes new significance as the self-reflective revelation of the earth itself. Through the centuries-long sustained attention of the Buddhist community, the earth addresses itself to the whole of the human population. While the exact style of its meditations may be totally inappropriate for the modern mentality, the subject of their concern is not. The basis for all of them is organic process.

This unremitting concentration on the phenomenal world as an organic aggregation of parts, bespeaks the earth's own initial self-understanding and reality. The

electron microscope of molecular biology and the equations of quantum and particle physics are recent means through which the earth has clarified the exact nature of its organicity and extended it to a final self-identity as one living biosphere, one organism.

The second message to contemporary human society which emerges in the earth's self-understanding through Hinayana Buddhist thought and praxis is the earth's cautionary warning of its own fragility. Repeatedly, the Buddhist tradition, having exposed the composite nature of phenomena, emphasized its correspondent impermanence. If things are not self-subsisting entities but are dependently originated and maintained by a complex of conditions, they are by that very fact liable to disarray and cessation. The heedless extinction of flora and fauna at the hands of human craving is ample confirmation for the transitory reality that is earth. But in the light of *paticcasamutpada* (conditioned co-production) where the being of one is dependent on the being of others, and the termination of one spells the termination of others, this revelation of the earth regarding the impermanence of all composite organisms, assumes dread implications that need no elaboration.

As Buddhism continued to reflect on the original intuition of *paticcasamutpada*, it realized in the *Mahayana* phase of its development a more positive and synthetic interpretation of the formula. Paradoxically, the reductive analysis of the sensory world into a series of component elements was intended by the Hinayana tradition to induce a profound detachment from it. In destroying the illusion of the personal ego, it simultaneously devalued phenomenal reality as an object of possessive human desire. But having successfully done so, the Hinayana was unable to re-invigorate its world with a new, more creative interpretation of it.

A brief qualification is in order however, if the Hinayana emphasized a reductive-analytic methodology to achieve its goal, there is evidence of a corresponding affective plane whose central intuition would realize its comprehensive implications in the later Bodhisattva ideal

of cosmic compassion. I refer to that group of Hinayana meditations known as the Divine Abidings, *Brahmavihara*.

Consisting of loving kindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity, these meditations testify to an order of coherence and mutual resonance operative within the very composite texture of phenomena which the Hinayana so thoroughly analyzed. The object of this group of meditations is "the breaking down of the barriers" which hatred, resentment, envy, indifference, greed, and cruelty erect between oneself and other beings. In the 52nd verse of the ninth chapter of his text, Buddhaghosa indicates the universal extensions and idealized ramifications of those four virtues. They transform oneself even while being actively projected towards and efficaciously pervading all beings, of every category in all directions, throughout the cosmos. Thus, while Hinayana analysis exhaustively revealed and emphasized the composite nature of phenomenal reality, it simultaneously demonstrated a vital connexity and ideal reciprocity contained within it:

May all beings [in all directions] be free from enmity, affliction and anxiety and live happily. May all breathing things...May all creatures...May all persons...May all who have a personality...May all women...May all men...May all Noble Ones...May all not Noble Ones...May all deities...May all human beings...May all those in states of loss...be free from enmity, affliction and anxiety, and live happily.

Although explicit to it, such a view was not sufficiently fostered, and Hinayana thought eventually entertained a belief in a reality of ultimate value, a *Nirvana* totally transcendent to an earthly existence of conditional processes, referred to as *Samsara*.

This cleft between *Nirvana* and *Samsara*, between an unconditional nominal reality and the world of finite contingent phenomena, became the axis for a new development in Buddhist history and for the final emergence of its ecological cosmology. Mahayana reflection picked up where Hinayana analysis

left off and continued to ponder the significance and the affective implications of "the together rising up of things." But before it would reach its most sublime articulation of that mystery, three advances in the areas of Buddhist symbolism and metaphysics would contribute fresh insight, thus facilitating its final expression.

In his *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, "Fundamentals on the Middle Way," Nagarjuna (c. 150-250) laid the seminal foundations for all the future schools of Mahayana Buddhism and presented human intellectual history with one of its major classics. Noting in his first chapter that the supreme teaching of the Buddha was that of *pratityasamutpada* (now in its Sanskrit form), he assumes that as the basic point of reference and the touchstone for his reasoning throughout the following twenty-six chapters. With an incisive logic, he reveals the untenability of any invidiously polarizing position which would assert one extreme viewpoint against its opposite. What concerns us here is his extension of earlier Hinayana analysis which had reduced phenomena to groupings of the five elementary constituents: matter, feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness.

Nagarjuna merely applied the logic of dependent origination to demonstrate that not even these elemental *skandhas* were ultimate; they too were without independent reality; they too were products of multiple contributing factors. While not strikingly apparent at first, such a deduction had crucial ramifications. According to the Hinayana, there were five basic "building blocks," and "the together rising up of things" was circumscribed to them. In other words, it was their innumerable combinations which lent shape and consistency to the phenomenal world, which was said to rise up through them. However, the five *skandhas* were irreducible and thus not subject to the law of *pratityasamutpada*. All other things were conditionally originated by them, but as ultimate facts, they subsisted as independent entities. Nagarjuna exposed the logical inconsistency of such a position, clearly implicating the contingent status of the *skandhas* themselves. But if things could

no longer be traced to just five elements to explain their existence, how and what sustained their rising up? sustained? Nagarjuna's inference was as clear as his logic was acute. The universe comes into being and persists as a totality in which each and every thing in it mutually conditions and depends upon every other thing. The entire universe rises up through the mutual influence and active participation of all its parts. While this was not made explicit by Nagarjuna himself, it was a critical advance in the theory of *pratityasamutpada*, extending its implications and expanding the Hinayana concern with organic processes to a logically grounded appreciation of the phenomenal universe as one integral organic reality.

Now, inherent to the principle of universal mutuality, of everything dependent on every other thing, is the principle of correlativity. Not only is the physical appearance and abiding presence of a thing dependently constituted by a universe of other things, but its intrinsic value and meaningful significance is likewise bestowed relative to them. Therefore, to speak of a transcendent reality without reference to the mundane is meaningless, to refer to an infinite without regard to what its finite is an empty statement. Each polarity collapses since the two terms are correlative to and derivative from each other. They are dependently originated with each other. Nagarjuna seized upon the Hinayana dichotomy between *nirvana* and *samsara*. To oppose the former, as a state of unconditional, transcendent reality, to the latter, as the sphere of contingent finite existence, is to posit a contradiction. The notion of *nirvana* as an Absolute, independent of and different from *samsara* as the realm of the phenomenal universe, is a logical absurdity. Since *nirvana* is inconceivable without *samsara*, since its very notion is conditioned by and relative to it, then, according to the logic of *pratityasamutpada*, the Absolute "rises up with" and finds value in the phenomenal universe. Nagarjuna presses their logical identity even further when he states in the twenty-fifth chapter of his treatise:

Samsara is nothing essentially different from nirvana. Nirvana is nothing essentially different from samsara. The realm of nirvana is the realm of samsara. Between the two, also, there is not the slightest difference whatsoever.

Never before nor since has such a straightforward equivalence been made between the infinite and the finite. Its role in the development of a Buddhist ecological philosophy and spirituality is paramount. The forthright assertion of the earth's sacrality as fully coincident with the Absolute is a singular refutation of those religious traditions that have surrendered the same earth to the savageries of technological exploitation as a mere footstool of the Almighty.

Complementing this insight of buddhist logic was a correspondent symbolization of the universe as an embryonic reality, the *Tathagatagarbha*, maturing to a full awareness of itself as the Absolute Reality or the Cosmic Body of the Buddha, the *Dharmakaya*. Having asserted the identity of *nirvana* and *samsara* through rational analysis, the Mahayana tradition assumed the imagery of an organic growth process to explain the inherent coherence between the two, despite an only apparent disparity. The representation of the universe as a self-emerging, and self-awakening interdependent totality, not only allowed for the possibility of different levels or stages of insight in that self-recognitive process, but further consolidated the value of the universe not only as an organic whole, but as an integral consciousness.

This last point was metaphysically grounded and elaborated upon by the *Vijnanavadin* or "Consciousness Only" school of the Mahayana tradition. While the theory of *pratityasamutpada* was central to its systematic presentation, its interpretation was peculiarly nuanced by a thorough-going idealism. Abbreviated to its barest form, the school argued the existence of only one reality: consciousness. In its absolute mode, it was referred to as *Alayavijnana* or "Storehouse Consciousness." Out of it the sensible shapes and features of the

empirical universe and the individual human consciousnesses which perceive that universe are actively and continuously projected. Persons and things "rise up together with" one another, are mutually influenced and conditioned by each other and share a fundamental dependence upon the ultimate "storehouse consciousness" from which they co-originate and through which they co-exist. While it is the primordial source and grounding principle of phenomenal existence, the *Alayavijnana* is itself circumscribed by it and, in a most direct way, is dependent upon human consciousness. For it is only through human perception that the Absolute contemplates the richness of its own self-manifesting diversity and comes to a full self-understanding in and as the totality of its universal contours and forms.

Transposed to an ecological perspective, the human assumes its proper dimension, and undoubtedly it is pre-eminent, but not because of any self-derived innate superiority as *erectus*, *sapiens*, or *faber*. Its distinction rests not in any physical, rational or technological prowess over the universe, but on its being the faculty through which the universe in all its variety is self-disclosed as the cosmic extension of the Absolute. In that same process the Absolute realizes its most determinate and concrete self-awareness as the originative source and ultimate nature of that very universe. In such a cosmology, the value of the human is its being the psychic coincidence of the phenomenal as Absolute, the Absolute as phenomenal. In the experience of enlightenment, human consciousness is the median realization in which each knows itself as the inherent modality of the other.

While the type of perception that has given rise to the technological consciousness of the present age is the single vision of pragmatic intentionality, Buddhism fostered a multiple-perspectival awareness of reality as "the together rising up" of the Absolute and the mutual interdependencies of the phenomenal. Rather than the constricted focus of applying means to self-willed ends, and the intrusive manipulation of persons and things to attain those purposes, Buddhism assumed for human consciousness a universal context and open

horizon for the self-disclosure of the real in the totality of its relations. The school of Hua-yen indicated the scope and intricacies of those relations, and represents the final phase in the present development of a Buddhist ecology.

In his *Treatise on the Golden Lion*, the seventh century Chinese patriarch, Fa-tsang (643-712) cryptically enumerated the "Six Characters" which together express the central intuition of the school. These six--universality, speciality, similarity, diversity, integration and differentiation--apply to every existent particularity. While preserving their individual unique identities, they reveal both the reciprocal disposability of each to all the others and to the dynamics of their mutual coherence as one universe. While Fa-tsang employed one of the golden lions that adorned the imperial palace where he originally lectured to exemplify these laws of differentiating identity, it is fitting in the light of our topic to call forth the earth itself as their living exemplar.

Through the character of universality, every element of the planet, from the molecules and the atoms of its fiery center to the animate communities of its flora and fauna is viewed as one organic biosphere, itself a member in the innumerable galaxies which constitute the cosmos. Under the aspect of speciality, each biospheric element assumes its own proper dimension as contributing a peculiar function; an individual energy to the common life-throb of the whole. Yet, this very uniqueness of each points to a similarity. Different with respect to function, every element shares with every other a final denomination as one of the countless organs of one earth body. Slightly nuancing the aspect of speciality, the fact that every element is made inimitable by all the others establishes a new level of diversity. That each member of the biosphere makes a uniquely unrepeatable contribution to the health of the whole earth, again evokes the haunting implications of the Buddha's original phrase "...this not becoming, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases." To the technological mentality, confident in its ability to compensate for any loss in the natural environment by its own

artificial manipulations, this assertion of the singular enrichment of each to the whole is a glaring indictment. The fifth character of integration defines each element of the planet as an active tending-towards and leaning-upon all other elements. They "together rise up" and maintain the one biosphere through their mutual, simultaneous collaboration which is possible precisely because each element reacts spontaneously out of its own particular frame of reference within the whole. This differentiated context out of and within which each element contributes to the biosphere is the sixth characteristic of phenomena. This position again questions the contemporary disregard for regional integrity as the source of a variegated richness for the physical and psychic health of the planet in the face of the rapidly assimilative homogeneity of artificially contrived technological environments.

By attributing these six characteristics to every individual element within the biosphere Hua Yen would encourage the modern mentality to pierce the myopic stare of the one-track vision of purposive consciousness that sees things only as means to specified ends. A reality in which things interrelate with things and contribute to the emergence of a planetary body which is sacred as the manifesting presence to and of the Absolute, such a reality is infinitely more complex and its contemplation infinitely more transfiguring than any mere manipulatory process could ever imagine.

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Maine Meditations

I

A tiny pine tree grows next to an old stone covered with moss, overshadowed by elder trees draped in wet green strands of hair. Who, in this busy world, knows of this little green creature? And what would such knowing add to its dignity, its sheer facticity? But in its truthfulness, its realness, in its being what it is and not another--in this it expresses and fulfills the way of God. Billions of years and trillions of events went into the shaping of this particular pine tree in this particular place at this particular time. Far from being nothing, in being itself, it is everything. That truly is only no-thing which is unconnected with the incredibly intricate web of meaning that is everything.

Here and now, surrounded by pine, rock, ocean and mist, one touches again the fundamental truths that sustain and endure. Each of us, too, is meant to be ourselves and not another. One cosmic mother has pressed upon her womb to birth you and me: baptized in this blood/water, supported by this bone/stone, nurtured by this flesh/earth. We have received a secret name whispered by her breath. To grow into this name, to become this word, is not to be no-thing, no matter what the world thinks, but is to become everything: pine, rock, ocean and air.

II

The bay shimmers under the full moon and in gestures of extravagant bliss spills its jewelled treasure again and again onto the shore. The sleeping ocean in its restless tossing knows not the Lover who moves its dreams, who stirs its depths, who excites its wetness.

Awakened within, the heart feels the nameless Presence that slips the mind's wet concepts and dances in its depths. Hierophany of moon and sea, holding within and without in hushed tension until the opening when the soul's debris is washed in waves of mercy and love. Reborn, it screams and gasps for air.

The wide fringes of the bay move outward in a narrowing path toward a distant unity. So the universe moves through cosmic time, carrying its shimmering forms. So human history shimmers with hierophanies as it wends its way. So each moment shimmers with eternity. So every face, every tree, every mountain shimmers.

Don St. John
Swan's Island
Maine

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