

The WOBBLY POT



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Boodja Wangakininy – Country Talking:
Dharma of Ecological Engagement

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Submissions to *THE WOBBLY POT* are welcome from all Sangha members. The next edition will be published in Spring, 2019 – a special issue dedicated to John Turner

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The Zen Way and the Environment

ROSS BOLLETER ROSHI
Hovea, December 15, 2018.

Welcome to you Aunty Oriel and Aunty Minyaloo, Elders of the Nyoongar people. We are honoured to have you present at our retreat, and look forward to hearing your wisdom concerning country and environment. Welcome to you Dr Michael Wright. Thank you for co-leading this retreat with me. We are grateful to you for setting in place our meeting with Aunty Oriel and Aunty Minyaloo today, and for introducing us to country over the last two years. Thank you Manita Beskow for your hospitality and support in hosting our retreat here at Hovea, your home. Welcome to you all.

The title of our retreat is '*BoodjaWangykininy~Country Talking: The Dharma of Ecological Engagement*', which is expressive of two streams of the ZGWA's activity over recent times: the stream of Sit On Country, and the stream of environmental concerns. Country Talking is the culmination of two years of sitting on country with Michael Wright at Kaata Gar-up (Kings Park). Michael's guidance has helped us to begin to make real the connection between Nyoongar and Zen spirituality, as well as encouraging us to bear witness to the suffering of Nyoongar people arising from the British invasion.

The second stream: that of environmental concerns and activity to prevent environmental destruction, surely includes the activism of ZGWA members. Back in 2016, a group of them joined in a large community protest by the Community Wildlife Corridor (CWC) to stop/hold the construction of the Roe-8 highway right through a wide area of bushland and into sacred wetlands. This protest helped to put a stop at that time to the implementation of Roe-8, thereby averting much of the destruction of the Beeliar wetlands. Subsequently, one of our ZGWA group members, Lizzie Finn, became involved in work with the CWC to reverse the damage by weeding the cleared land to enable native vegetation to flourish. This year additional ZGWA members have become involved in this weeding project and also in revegetation projects which are now planned for the cleared land. There are further plans afoot to find feasible

pro-environment projects which will be open to ZGWA members to engage in on an ongoing basis. Trish McAuliffe's formation of Buddhists for the Environment has given us ways to support climate action and protest against degradation of the environment, including destruction of land and aquifers through gas fracking. Over recent times we have also had talks on environmental themes by ZGWA members and myself.

I will begin by talking briefly about Zen and the environment, then Michael Wright will give a talk, entitled: *BoodjaWangykininy: Country Talking: Bearing witness as the pathway to deepening the work for connecting to country*. Talks by Trish McAuliffe, Kathy Shiels, Mark Edwards, Lizzie Finn and Ingvar Anda will follow across the weekend.

Britta Biederman is our MC, and we are grateful to her for guiding us through the stages of our retreat here at Hovea.

The Zen Way: The interdependence of nature and humanity

The Zen Way is primarily practical. Along with meditation, work is an important aspect of the Way – in fact work itself is an important form of meditation. In the old monasteries of China, this surely meant work in nature. Monasteries were self-sufficient, which meant cultivating rice, milking cows, and lighting fires for cooking, as well as cooking itself. Apart from the necessity of work, the acts of hoeing, planting, harvesting, cutting wood, drawing water, and sifting and cooking rice all provided a variety of means for forgetting oneself in the act of uniting with the matter at hand, and thereby opportunities for awakening.

More broadly, the Zen Way presents us with a co-operative vision of the universe, where we are not lords of creation, and nature is in no way beholden to us. In fact, nature doesn't owe us anything, and we owe it everything. Furthermore, nature is not given to us to exploit, and we don't have dominion over beasts and birds. Humanity is

settled in nature along with cicadas, cats and crows. In the most fundamental sense, all beings are fundamentally equal. So no overlordship of nature, either. Moreover, in terms of life here on this planet, we can say that, from a Zen perspective, nature and humanity are interdependent and indivisible. In fact, it is impossible to conceive of humanity – although we somehow manage to do this all the time – without the natural world, and without the universe at large.

Lawrence Krauss in his book *A Universe from Nothing* writes: ‘Happily for us, stars don’t explode that often, about once per hundred years per galaxy. But we are lucky that they do, because if they didn’t we may not be here. One of the most poetic facts I know about the universe is that essentially every atom in your body was once inside a star that exploded. Moreover, the atoms in your left hand probably came from a different star than did those in your right. We are all, literally, star children, and our bodies made of star dust’.

This is the intimacy between us and the universe expressed in physical terms, but true intimacy between the universe and us is more than this. Here’s a story from Zen family history – the Blue Cliff Record, Case 53 – involving two of our ancestors and a wild duck:

Mazu and Baizhang were taking a walk, and saw a wild duck flying by.
‘What is that?’ asked Mazu.
‘A wild duck,’ responded Baizhang
‘Where did it go?’ asked Mazu.
‘It flew away,’ answered Baizhang.
Mazu twisted Baizhang’s nose, and Baizhang cried out in pain.
‘Why! It didn’t fly away at all,’ said Mazu.



Duck Sketch. Wikimedia Commons.

With one twist, a wild duck – along with mountains and rivers, rocks and stars is revealed as our intimate nature. The plants and animals of our beautiful planet are, at the deepest level, intimately you, yourself, and you are intimately them. Like this, the universe is present in your least activity: opening your eyes to the morning light, closing your eyes to sleep last thing at night.

The story goes that before his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, demonic forces tried to unseat the Buddha, because their king Mara claimed that place under the Bodhi tree. As they proclaimed their leader’s powers, Mara demanded that Gautama produce a witness to confirm his spiritual awakening. The Buddha simply touched the earth with his right hand. Traditional accounts have the earth literally speaking on behalf of the Buddha, saying, or even roaring, ‘I am your witness.’ However, in Zen terms, this matter is more subtle. Do you want to know how the earth bears witness to you? Listen. Listen.

We bear witness to the intimate connection that each of us has – and that we all have – to the earth, which is our true face, our true and timeless nature. This intimacy of the natural world and ourselves means that we have responsibilities to the earth so that we treat it with respect and care: the care and respect we would, or should, accord to our own face and body. This means, at the very least, knowing our place and taking care of the environment so that future generations can inherit it for their sustenance, for their lives, *as* their lives.

When we are caught up in the deluded idea that I am here (I point to my chest) and the world is out there, we can end up by treating the environment as a kind of painted backdrop to our self-centred preoccupations. As something merely for our use. Like this, we harm the earth, and other sentient and non-sentient beings. If we are going to ensure the survival of other species, human communities, and indeed the earth itself, we must bear witness to the earth by maintaining it, and by caring for it.

Nisargadatta wrote: ‘When I look inside and see that I am nothing, that’s wisdom. When I look outside and see that I am everything, that’s love. Between these two my life turns.’ It is important to awaken to the timeless essential vastness – what Nisargadatta calls ‘nothing’ – but we must then walk that experience into our life. We cannot live in the place of empty oneness, and if we try to set up residence there we are of no earthly use to anyone. When we look outside and see that we are everything, that is love –or more familiarly, compassion – which bears witness to this embattled planet with its suffering beings, and gives hands, feet and heart to saving whoever and whatever we can. This brings us to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Activism.

The Bodhisattva Way of Activism

A Bodhisattva is a being who is becoming enlightened, someone who is enlightened, someone who enlightens others. According to Mahayana tradition the bodhisattva chooses to remain in samsara to help all sentient beings end their suffering and reach enlightenment, before stepping off the wheel of birth and death and entering nirvana, herself.

In our dojo at the conclusion of the evening we chant ‘Great Vows for All’—the Four Bodhisattva Vows. The first of these vows is: ‘Though the many beings are numberless, I vow to save them.’ What do we mean by ‘saving the many beings’? In the first instance, ‘saving’ means actively including them in our heart and mind. When we do this, we let go of our self-centred concerns and preoccupations, allow the world in, and bear witness to its suffering. Secondly, we make the vow practical, and do what we can to help to relieve the suffering of this mysterious and beautiful world in which we find ourselves.

David Loy¹ writes:

The bodhisattva’s job is to do the best he or she can, without knowing what the consequences will be. Have we already passed ecological tipping points and human civilisation is doomed? We don’t know. Yet rather than being intimidated, the bodhisattva embraces ‘don’t know mind,’ because Buddhist practice opens us up to the awesome mystery of an impermanent world where everything is changing, whether or not we notice it. If we don’t really know what’s happening, how do we really know what’s possible, until we try?

What can we do to help? If we can help at all, our contribution is likely to be small and local. But surely it is worth doing whatever we can. In this, we depend on each other, for this isn’t something that we can do alone. I hope that this retreat will deepen our connections in this work and inspire and encourage us in the face of its many challenges.

The Bodhisattva, through deep practice and the experience of emptiness develops equanimity, and doesn’t give up in the face of opposition and disappointment. Stickability in the face of difficulty is an enduring quality of the Bodhisattva. At the same time – and here’s another contrary – there’s no progress without contraries – Zen

practice encourages flexibility and creativity: qualities that are vital in working together, where we depend on each other, and indeed where we are all part of the problem!

In activism, zazen is so important because it is a fathomless source of potential, as well as a refuge to which we can return over and over to restore our energy, avert burn-out, and bring the healing power of the practice to the exhausting complexities of working for change – including the doubts and fears we inevitably face in that work.

Each of us brings such different skills, inclinations and character to the Bodhisattva activism, and there are so many ways in which we might contribute. These could include artistic creation, creating networks with groups elsewhere in the world for mutual inspiration, or even participating in a retreat such as this one, in which we share our experience and aspirations, and hopefully do not feel so alone as we undertake the work of protecting what is threatened, even as we grieve what has been destroyed.

Finally, it’s best not to wait until you are fully awakened – or even awakened! – to pitch in! Like the lotus in the midst of fire, you awaken yourself and others in the midst of the passions and suffering of this fleeting world – where else would you do it?

Copyright Ross Bolleter, March 1, 2019

¹From D. Loy, ‘The New Bodhisattva Path’. Huffpost, 11/26/2012. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-new-bodhisattva-path_b_2166676?guccounter=1

Boodja Wangkiny: Country Talking: Bearing Witness as the Pathway to Deepening the Work for Connecting to Country

MICHAEL WRIGHT
Hovea, December 15, 2018.

Kia, wanju, wanju nidja Wadjuk Nyoongar boodja.

Hi, welcome here on Wadjuk Nyoongar country

Gyun miyal koort, wirin djoorapin dinang.

My eyes heart and spirit are happy to see you here.

Ngulluck koorling nyin-iny dwonk kaditj kadidiny Nyoongar wirin Nyoongar boodja karla boodja.

We gather here together to sit and listen and learn about Nyoongar spirituality on Nyoongar boodja our boodja

Walking the Path

Bill Neijie has long been an inspiration for me. I have photo of him in my office, and his powerful presence looms large over me; it is very comforting. English was not his first language, as you will hear in the following poem, but his words are powerful regardless and illustrates his incredible depth of wisdom.

This story e can listen careful
and how you want to feel on your feeling.
This story e coming through your body
e go right down foot and head
fingernail and blood...through the heart
and e can feel it because e'll come right through.

The sentence this story e can listen carefully, implies much, but who or what is he referring to when he says who is listening, he says the story is listening; but could he mean is the country listening. He continues, this story, or country, e coming through your body, e go right down foot and head, fingernail and blood...through the heart and e can feel it because e'll come right through. As a metaphor for being totally one with the country, I like to think when he says story he is actually referring to country

and when he says e can listen carefully, he does mean it literally that the country can and does listen carefully.

I have told this story many times but I feel it deserves repeating; for repetition is a constant theme for deepening understanding of the Aboriginal worldview. Some years ago on a bus trip in central Australia, on the Pitjantjatjara lands, with a group of students we had a very special experience. We had been travelling for quite a period, for a number of hours, when the driver stopped the bus among a large outcrop of granite rocks. He told us to find somewhere to sit among the rocks and he would call us back onto bus in a little while. After a period and we had got back onto the bus he explained to us that the traditional owner of that country had told him to explain to us that it was necessary for us to sit for a while before travelling onto her country; for the country needed to welcome us; I repeat for the country needed to welcome us, and to repeat what Bill Neije says e, the country can and will listen carefully. The phrase the country needs to welcome us, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; we are one.

Central Australia is a very special place. Wide and expansive; untouched and mostly unspoiled. This desert country is truly alive, it breathes and not only can e (the land) listen carefully it can and does communicate on a

deep level, so deep in fact it can be easily missed or misunderstood. In a story recounted by a friend, who is non-Aboriginal, who lived and worked in a remote community on the Pitjantjatjara lands with Elders from the community, told me of an incident when out with the Elders on country. They were travelling across country and he was driving, where suddenly in his peripheral vision he saw the landscape literally changing, it was changing, becoming alive, with the rocks shifting and changing into half human and half animal forms. Shocked he stopped the car; for what seemed an eternity, he looked up and saw the Elders in the rear-view mirror, and was taken aback, for they were smiling knowingly at him; they understood and knew and saw what he saw. He recognised the forms, because he had been told the stories by the Elders of the Tjukurpa², the dreaming, the creation stories of Anangu (pronounced arn-ung-oo) people, but like most white people thought they were just stories, stories of the imagination. He told me the experience was life changing; it changed completely his worldview, and as a result he could no longer see the world in ways he had previously. And to quote Bill Neije again for what I believe my friend experienced was this story, the story of country, e (country) was revealing itself to him, coming through his body e go right down to his foot and to his head, fingernails and blood...through his heart and he can feel it because the country come right through.

Nyoongar country, like the rest of Australia, is very old and ancient, and it too has its stories. It was here before humans arrived and it will be here after the last human has left. Lessons from the past and indeed the present have shown that as humans we are still lacking in our understanding of country; to deepen our understanding we need to be in relationships with the spirits of the land. Disconnection from the boodja (country) is problematic for all people, because it is a disconnection to the spirit, the 'wirin' of the land. Nyoongar people know and have a deep and abiding spiritual connection to the land (boodja). In the Nyoongar language when a woman is pregnant she is 'boodjarri' meaning she is 'carrying the spirit of the country'. The spirit of the country is forming as a child within the mother's womb. The unborn child is intricately the spirit of the land and the child is therefore both connected and part of its country, to their boodja. They are protected and nurtured by spirit of the land.

This spiritual connection to country occurs through a formal arrangement of a 'totem', recognised while in the womb and given at birth. A 'totem' is most often represented as an animal, and may also include rocks and trees. There is no distinction in the Nyoongar worldview

of animate and inanimate, trees and rocks have a life force. Your 'totem' both shapes and defines who you are, and your responsibilities and relationship in the group. Nyoongar Elder Noel Nannup says by living and breathing your totem and by knowing it intimately you begin to know yourself.

Sadly, most Australian's have been denied this deep knowledge about the deep connections for Aboriginal people and the land. They were told instead that Aboriginal people were illiterate and uncivilised, and that the arrival of Europeans and Christianity in 1788 was beneficial and timely, for it was the Europeans who saved them from themselves and from extinction. Thankfully, with new evidence and shift in public perception we can now disprove these assertions; as Ray Norris the Chief Research Scientist at CSIRO, concludes, Australians 'must overcome the intellectual inertia that keeps us in that old paradigm, (sic that Aboriginal culture is primitive), stopping us from recognising the enormous contribution that Aboriginal culture can make to our understanding of the world, and to our attempts to manage it.

In preparing for the shift in moving to the space for deeper understanding of the Aboriginal worldview, the concept of liminality describes the act of moving from one space to the next. Liminality is an anthropological term and the concept refers to the middle or transformative stage; meaning to 'stand at the threshold' of the journey. The three tenets of bearing witness provide the ideal lens in deepening and understanding of the Aboriginal worldview. In the following section, I will unpack the three tenets of bearing witness in the context of Aboriginal spirituality.

Bearing Witness

The American Zen Buddhist Roshi Bernie Glassman, who recently died on the 4th of November 2018, stated that bearing witness is not about finding answers, 'for there is little energy in answers, but rather it is about exploring questions'. An Aboriginal worldview is also not so interested in answers, but rather in the questions of why and what. Bearing witness according to Bernie,

is about living a questioning life, a life of unknowing. If we are ready to live such a life, without fixed ideas or answers, then we are ready to bear witness to every situation, no matter how difficult, offensive, or painful it is. Out of that process of bearing witness the right action of making peace, of healing, arises (Glassman, 1998, p. xiv).

² Tjukurpa: the law given to us by our grandfathers and grandmothers, our fathers and mothers, to hold onto in our heads and in our hearts. Tjukurpa stories are represented through inma (songs and ceremonies), stories, dances and art.

Bernie Glassman was a co-founder of the Zen Peacemaker Order, and an exemplar in the practice of liminality; moving effortlessly between spaces. Key teachings of the Zen Peacemaker Order are three tenets for bearing witness, 1) letting go of fixed ideas of ourselves and the universe, 2) Bearing witness, and seeing what comes up, and 3) Loving actions or compassionate action: we do not come to heal, we do not come to fix anything, we come to bear witness:

When we bear witness, we become the situation, whether it is homelessness, poverty, illness, violence, death — the right action arises by itself. We don't have to worry about what to do. We don't have to figure out solutions ahead of time. Peacemaking is the functioning of bearing witness. Once we listen with our entire body and mind, loving action arises. Loving action is right action. It's as simple as giving a hand to someone who stumbles or picking up a child who has fallen on the floor. We take such direct, natural actions every day of our lives without considering them special. And they're not special. Each is simply the best possible response to that situation in that moment.

Not Knowing and Letting Go of Fixed Ideas of Myself, Others and the Universe

Not knowing and letting go of fixed ideas can be very confronting. How can we just relinquish that which has provided stability and refuge from the world? Letting go can, ironically, provide a sense of relief and a freedom to be whatever. Importantly, it allows for profound silence and stillness.

The travel writer Pico Iyer quoted in his TED talk 'The Art of Stillness' that 'stillness has nothing to do with settledness or stasis' but rather it only occurs 'by taking (sic yourself) away from the clutter and distraction (sic so) that you can begin to hear something out of earshot and recall that listening is much more invigorating than giving voice to all the thoughts and prejudices that keep me company 24 hours a day... it's only by going nowhere' (2014).

All great traditions talk of the importance of listening with stillness; 'hearing something out of earshot'. To truly practice letting go of fixed ideas one needs to listen with stillness. Bearing witness in this context as suggested by Iyer is by being present and taking oneself away from the clutter and letting go of fixed ideas of ourselves and of the universe.

Again, Bill Neidjie describes very elegantly in the following poem that by letting go of my fixed ideas my dilemmas can be resolved;

We...we like story
Because story going with your body
You can listen careful
When you go to sleep you thinking...
Oh good story! I like that story
I want to keep it.

Listening with stillness with my entire being is a requirement for letting go of fixed ideas. If I am to truly connect, I need to hear and listen with my entire being and only then will it allow for loving action or compassion to arise. Techniques that allow for deep connection include listening intently with my entire body, and less giving voice to all my thoughts and prejudices. Connecting to story, my story, your story, is very much a part of the Aboriginal experience. Again, to quote Bill Neidjie, he reminds us, 'because story going with your body' and when you do 'you can listen careful'. I/we need ways to connect, to make sense of the world around us, and it is through the process of story that helps us reconnect the strands of our life. Story, our own and others, provides both the form and shape that ensures a more authentic connection to ourselves, to others, to the earth, to the sky and ultimately to the universe. For we are so very intimately interconnected; our bodies and the universe.

Bearing Witness to the Joy and Suffering of the World

There is much to learn from Aboriginal culture and spirituality, and combined with the practice of bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world one can see the importance of developing profound connections to place, which provides for greater empathy to treat all things, animals, plants and landforms with deep respect. *The practice of bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world is to be fully present to life in its many forms.* We bear witness and be present and open to life regardless. Together, not-knowing and bearing witness can prepare us to be open in facing our fears and inner demons with compassion.

Aboriginal spirituality is critical to the survival of our species and to the planet, but time is pressing and there is still much to learn from Aboriginal culture. It can begin with a greater acceptance and awareness of the importance and relevance of Aboriginal spirituality. Sadly, modernity has created this split, and as such most people are seriously disconnected from the natural world; wandering aimlessly, not knowing and understanding why. Developing a deeper awareness of Aboriginal spirituality can help bridge this gap.

Knowing the history can help in providing for more awareness. For example, in 2006, Native Title was granted

to the Wadjuk Nyoongar people in the Perth area, and in the initial judgment, Justice Wilcox recognised the evidence provided by the thirty Nyoongar witnesses as extraordinary, and went on to say that he was very impressed with their evidence:

By the extent to which witnesses were able to trace their line of descent back for many generations and identify their contemporary relatives, despite the paucity of written records, and to the extent they were able to speak about Aboriginal customs, beliefs and codes of conduct (2006, p.12).

Aboriginal people and their story, being traced back through generations, is consistent with the story of being Aboriginal. Going back in time, to an ancient time, 45,000 years ago, with the story of Lake Mungo when Aboriginal people lived in and around the Willandra lake systems that stretched north from Broken Hill to the south coast of Victoria. Paleontological evidence has shown that the Aboriginal people lived simply, hunting and fishing near the lakes. The key teachings from the Lake Mungo experience offers insight and ways forward for us living in the 21st century. The past continues on today, for many of those early cultural practices are still present with us today, evidence of the power of story, both of the people and the boodja. As Bill Neidjie reminds us again, 'We...we are like story; because story going with your body; if you can listen careful. I like the simplicity of story, my story and your story being our story, and together the story of Lake Mungo becomes our story so we all can then learn to bear witness to the joy and suffering of the world'.

Taking Action that Arises From Not Knowing and Bearing Witness

Working with uncertainty can be like working with the koan Mu; watching and waiting for the unexpected. Working with uncertainty provides an opportunity for spaciousness and compassion to arise. Taking action that arises from the not knowing is the koan; it is not possible to predict what action needs to be taken, or when it should be taken, or knowing what might result. There is always the intention that whatever the action, it needs to be caring and beneficial to all.

What action to be taken should be approached firstly as a question. Not knowing may be required and staying and bearing witness. What can be assumed the right action always fits the situation perfectly. Combined with the practice of observation, taking action from that which arise is the perfect fit. Noel Nannup speaks of being mindful in watching and observing the changing conditions that occur on country, for example, watching the seasons and the subtle changes that occur both with

the patterns in the weather and on the plants and on the behavior of animals; seeing and watching the change/s are critical to being truly present.

The Australian author Kim Mahood (2018) writing in the Monthly of the work of the Ngangkari healers in central Australia, and their work with Aboriginal people: Their approach is to be totally present when engaging with Aboriginal people who are experiencing a mental health issue. In their work with Aboriginal people, alongside western doctors in the hospital at Alice Springs, they are challenged by the limitations of Western medicine. They are bemused by the limitations of the Western doctors who were unable to see or feel the spirits that are present in people presenting with mental health issues; they say these spirits 'must be in the proper place for a person to be healthy'. As one of the senior ngangkari women commented:

Spirits are not particularly difficult to work with. If you can see them, you can get them! They are not overly clever or trying to get away or escape you. They are just confidently themselves and just need to be where they should be! (2018, p. 51).

Working with different world views is both challenging and confusing. Non-Aboriginal people often struggle to recognise and appreciate the complexity and sophistication of the Aboriginal worldview, for as Bruce Pascoe states:

The songlines of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people connected clans from one side of the country to another. The cultural, economic, genetic and artistic conduits of the songlines brought goods, art, news, ideas, technology and marriage partners to centres of exchange (2014, p. 129).

I am often struck and bewildered with the hubris of the Western worldview; the early settlers because of their ignorance and denial almost costing them their lives. They failed to recognise the sophistication and scope of the Aboriginal worldview and only saw what they wanted to see; they failed because of their fixed views and ideas. They failed to recognise the potential and opportunities of living and acting differently in a different place; their fear was so great that they were only concerned in replicating what they knew. This is the pointy end for all of our dilemmas; because of our fixation and fear we remain stuck. Sadly, because of our fixed ideas we fail see recognise our potential; the potential in others and in our environment.

Final Words...

Bill Neidjie again, and here he is reminding us of our deep and abiding connections:

Listen carefully this, you can hear me. I'm telling you because earth just like mother and father or brother of you. The tree same thing. Your body, my body I suppose I'm same as you...anyone. Tree working when you sleeping and dream.

The contrast to comments by Bill Neidjie is the story told by the historian Inga Clendinnen in her 1999 Boyer lectures, where she recounts an incident that occurred on the south coast of WA in 1801. A French scientific expedition was exploring the south coast when two naturalists come upon a Nyoongar couple, a man and a woman digging for shellfish. As the French scientists approach the couple, the man runs away, but the woman totally afraid and alone lies face down into the sand, hoping that they would go away. They do not and instead surround her, first by placing beside her a mirror and small knife, and then by examining her; picking her up, checking her mouth to see if she has still had her teeth. Apparently, having Aboriginal have teeth was considered important by Europeans at the time. Having conducted these intrusions, the men withdrew a short distance to observe; the woman aware the men were still present crawls away whimpering in fear on her hands and knees.

Curiosity in this context is demeaning; and their search and manner in conducting their scientific inspections, disrespectful and inhuman. We read and hear such an account of this incident that occurred over 250 years ago and we rightfully say what happened is both shameful and inappropriate. But I challenge you that are we really any different today than those French sailors; they did not think they did any wrong. In their view they were acting as scientists would, only investigating searching in the name of science, important information to further humanity. Indeed, again I ask, have our attitudes and

actions changed much? To be sure most of us would not act in the same way as the two French scientists did way back in 1801, but is it not true that we are still blinded by ignorance and a sense of duty when we behave in ways that are demeaning? The impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people has and continues to be the cause of untold grief. For example, in 2018, 55% of all children currently in state care in WA are Aboriginal; meaning one in two children in state care are Aboriginal. We know of the impact of the removal of children, the stolen generations, and yet we continue to repeat these same mistakes; will we ever learn?

Finally, history is important and points to ways how we can change if we choose. Sadly, many Australians still do not know the true history of colonisation and its impact on Aboriginal people. Standing at the threshold is clearly a process that can open one to the many possibilities and can allow Australians to be open and curious to investigating the true history of colonisation. As Aboriginal people we hope for that future.

Ngalak kaditj kadidjiny dwongke nyinyiny dinang—iny miyal.

We sit and listen with our ears and we look and see with our eyes.

Debakan, Debaka, Debakan



Walking Trail in John Forrest National Park, Hovea, WA. Wikimedia Commons

Listen, Listen. The Earth is Calling

TRISH McAULIFFE

Hovea, December 15, 2018.

Today I'm not going to talk in depth about the destructive forces that are happening everywhere in the world. This is captured well by many writers, including in Naomi Klein's book, 'This Changes Everything', except to say that climate change is a deeply ethical issue. It has profound justice implications both for those who have contributed least to the greenhouse gas pollution, but who will suffer disproportionately from its effects. This is especially so for the poorest nations, low lying island nations, and not least, the children now and yet to be born.

Sitting here with you today in this beautiful patch of nature, I'd like to begin by reflections on my journey that has led me to be a passionate participant in the environment movement.

Like all of you, I have arrived at my unique point in my journey because of various happenings in my life. Pivot points if you will. Our life flows like a stream; it hits rocks and flows for a while in another direction. It will never flow past that point again. Sometimes that rock may have a huge impact on our flow, while at other times we will hardly notice the gradual shifts. These can be people we meet, joyous or catastrophic events; moments in life that we can't even describe because they are outside our terms of reference, perhaps, such as we experience at times in our *Zazen*. *I will share some of my pivot points.*

I was born in England, during the second world war, to working class parents, who lived with extended family. My favourite aunt who lived with us was an animal activist who included my sister and myself in her work with vulnerable creatures. These were my first activist moments.

A reluctant migrant to Perth at age 20, I was in those early times missing the green of England, and like the early settlers, I would have preferred to remake the landscape in the images I had left behind. Unlike the early settlers however, such ability to effect such catastrophic changes as introducing hooved animals, land clearing, and later broad acre crops etc, were beyond my remit. Slowly, this strange and exotic land grew enormously in my affections.

Following divorce, and the need to think of the future for myself and two young children, I went to university to study social work. This enabled me to more coherently place the micro and the macro into perspective. Working with the most vulnerable in society, I always had to work to make changes at the macro-institutional and political levels as well as dealing with the day to day pressures of those going through incredibly difficult times in their lives. At university I was also introduced to the theories of Carl Jung, and I was especially interested in his theories of synchronicity and the collective unconscious. Through these interests I met Manita who was in the process of becoming a Jungian Analyst.

Of course, there were many other pivot points too numerous to discuss here, but I will mention my introduction to Zen in the early 1990s, following loss of a meaningful relationship. The collective unconscious and the Net of Indra seemed to be meeting points for me. Sitting moment to moment had profound if subtle effects on both my personal life, and my spiritual connection to country.

Through Manita, I met Harvey Smith, who lived on this land as a yogi for most of his long life. Harvey was intimately connected to all life forms here, which formed a basis for Manita's later work in such intimate and profound ways to protect Harvey's legacy. I sat in meditation with Harvey on the wonderful rocks here. He used to sing to the trees, and explained how they prefer certain tones and tunes, which he observed through subtle movements. He was also in communication with the Devas on the land and respected their directions in the care of this place.

Whilst I cannot lay claims to such insights, I have had on occasions, deep connection to rock. The first occurred whilst visiting Uluru. I felt the energy of the rock surging through me during a meditation nearby. It was frightening to me at the time, and I pulled myself out of the meditation. Fear, un confronted, can prevent deeper realisations I reflected on later.

This happened also during a dream when I knew it was not a dream about a rock, but that I was that rock. I felt on waking, the rock energy surging through me. I ask myself if these are our earlier life form manifestations reminding me of my beginnings and connections to all of life. It might account for why I was drawn so strongly to fight against fracking, which causes the blasted rock to release its many and dangerous elements into our water land and air.

Connection to rock is captured beautifully in the following: In 'Thinking like a Mountain' Robinson Jeffers wrote 'Oh, Lovely Rock'. He describes his feelings whilst camping in a gorge:

It was the rock wall that fascinated my eyes and mind. Nothing strange: light-grey diorite with two or three slanting seams in it, smooth-polished by the endless attrition of slides and floods: no fern nor lichen, pure naked rock...as if I were seeing rock for the first time. As if I were seeing through the flame-lit surface into the real and bodily and living rock and felt its intense reality with awe and wonder, this lovely rock.

Another of those events which seems to be outside our terms of reference, and which are difficult to describe, occurred for me two or three years ago, during a movement and sound meditation called the Latihan. For two subsequent weeks, the same experience occurred, which was distressing at the time. I felt as though the pain of the earth was being channelled through me. Strange sounds beyond my voice range emanated from me, witnessed by others. I believe it was actually the earth warning about what we are doing to our planet

The Buddhist belief is that all of us are inseparable from nature and indeed the whole universe. I am sure that everyone here has experienced the great wonder of interconnectedness with wild creatures. Looking into the eyes of a bobtail, a bird, an emu or a dolphin, we can sense the joy of experiencing the soul of another species. These are our distant forbears as well as a current part of who we are. Conversely, in that same connection with wild creatures in captivity, or suffering at the hands of humans, we can feel personally that distress. I remember visiting the Taronga zoo in Sydney and observing a caged silver back gorilla, a magnificent, intelligent creature. He resolutely refused to offer other than his back to the onlookers. I shed tears for his suffering and disgust. How painful it is as we see ourselves in such situations.

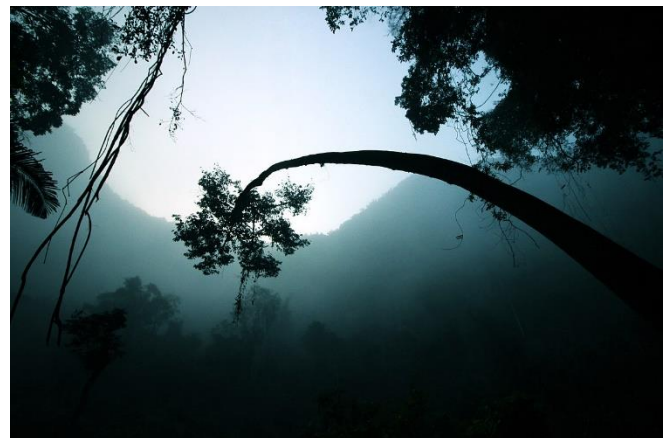
We can feel that interbeing also with trees, rocks and rivers; what wonder and joy we are gifted freely. Then the personal violations we feel when we see trees felled

unnecessarily, losing their right to just be, as well as denying habitat for wild creatures; rivers and waterways drying up or becoming over polluted; the earth fractured and blasted by mining; or pacific islanders losing their homes and livelihoods as sea levels rise. Concrete jungles and barren wasteland can never replace the magnificent and healing powers of the natural world. A heritage we take for granted at our peril.

In our recent Zen intensive with Mari, we were able to take time out to really connect with our surroundings in meaningful experiences. We felt nature working its wonder through us in poetic and moving ways.

Thich Nhat Hahn was once asked 'What do we need to do to save our world?' His response was 'What we most need to do is to hear within us the sound of the Earth crying.'

Joanna Macy pointed out that 'The idea that the Earth is crying within us doesn't make sense if we view ourselves as separate individuals. Yet if we think of ourselves as deeply embedded in a larger web of life, as in Gaia theory, Buddhism and indigenous traditions suggest, then the idea of the world feeling through us seems entirely natural.' Kwan Yin who hears the cries of the world is another example of how this is deeply imbedded in Buddhist thought.



Arching Tree in a Jungle – Vietnam. Wikimedia Commons

John Seed spent many years as a rainforest activist, and he noted that our Earth is working through us, and we are not alone. In an excerpt from 'The Council of all Beings', a deep ecology work-shop, John Seed speaks as Rainforest:

I am Rainforest. Counted in your human years, I am over a hundred and thirty million years old. If I were one of your buildings, you would take precious care of me. But instead you destroy me. For newsprint and cheap ham-burgers you lay me

waste. You destroy me so carelessly, leaving the rest to rot and burn. You push needless roads through me, followed by empty-hearted real-estate grabbers who purport to own me. You cause my thick layer of precious topsoil to wash away, destroying the coral reefs that fringe me. I can't stand your screaming machines that tear through my trunks, rip my flesh, reducing hundreds of years of slow growth to sawdust and furniture. How dare you!

In preparing for this talk, I was reading Joanna Macy and Molly Brown's book 'Coming Back to Life', in which there is a chapter on 'What is the pain of the world' 'What we are dealing with here is akin to the original meaning of compassion: suffering with. It is the distress we feel on behalf of the larger whole of which we are a part. It is the pain of the world itself, experienced in each of us.'

Joanna Macy says we are in a time of great turning and great unravelling. She identifies three stories we can choose from that underpin the lens through which we see and understand what is happening in the world.

1. *Business as Usual* is the story of the Industrial Growth Society where the defining assumption is that there is little need to change the way we live. It is all about getting ahead. Economic recessions and extreme weather conditions are just temporary difficulties from which we will surely recover and even profit.
2. *The Great Unravelling*. This draws attention to the disaster that business as usual has caused and continues to create. This is backed by evidence of the collapse of biological, ecological, economic and social systems.
3. *The Great Turning* is the story from those who see the great unravelling and don't want it to have the last word. It involves the emergence of new and creative responses to enable the transitions from the Industrial Growth Society to a Life-Sustaining Society. This is about joining together to act for the sake of the earth.

John Seed describes deep ecological thinking as requiring:

a kind of vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil: not a shell so much as delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self, ennobled and extended...as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves...we must affirm the world is a being, part of our own body.

He also says that non-human memories can surface with particular intensity and authenticity when consciousness is altered.

John Seed and Joanna Macy in an essay called 'Gaia Meditations', from 'Thinking like a Mountain' is a discussion about the four elements. Regarding Earth, they say it is

matter made from rock and soil...pulled by the moon as the magna circulates through the planet heart and roots suck molecules into biology. Earth pours through us, replacing each cell in the body every seven years. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we incorporate and excrete the earth, are made from earth. I am that. You are that.

So how do we maintain our balance and commitment to sustaining a habitable earth, without rending ourselves asunder? Just anger on its own is often counter-productive. Love goes a long way, but to be effective it needs to be an active love, perhaps fuelled but not overwhelmed by anger. Just a recognition of the feelings and the energy it can provide us but not letting it get in the way of clear sight and right action.

Bruce Pascoe, in his enlightening book 'Dark Emu', shows proven records in the journals of early white explorers describing a sophisticated socio-political society with agriculture, aquaculture, storage and preservation facilities, fire management and permanent settlements. These records were hidden from view so that the concept of 'Terra Nullus' could be propagated with little hindrance from the people who had cared more sustainably for the land and its people for many thousands of years.

We need to consult with and learn from the wisdom of the original inhabitants of the land in ways that are not exploitative. These are treasures before us that have for too long been either ignored or under-valued.

Indigenous people have deep knowledge of the earth. They know their connection to the land. I have spoken with Miklo Corpus, a courageous aboriginal man, who is trying to protect his land from fracking. He erected a hut to protect him from the searing Kimberley heat as he has held vigil for over 2 years outside a Buru energy fracking well, which has leaked methane gas. The local council pulled his only shelter down, saying he did not have planning permission. However, he says he is still not moving off his land and continues to protest the assault on the land he cares so deeply about. He knows well that we are all made up of the four elements of earth, air, water and fire, and how they should be protected as the planetary life force.

I am impressed by how some individuals are inspired to act with enormous courage and energy and go on to form world-wide movements from small beginnings. I recently heard an address by Bill McKibbin of 350.Org. His passion grew from his deep involvement in the Methodist Church, in Vermont USA. He was strongly influenced by the gospel of Matthew on which he meditated deeply. In particular he was influenced by the teaching of 'feed the hungry, clothe the naked and care for the orphans and widows.' Love thy neighbour was the theme. In caring for others, he didn't feel it necessary to categorise human and non-human. Hence Bill's deep care for the Earth implied a belief in non-separation. He started out with six friends who shared the deep concern for the catastrophe unfolding in terms of climate change and global warming. This small group were inspired to take one continent each to carry out their work. Visions like that with so little resources to start with give evidence of something greater than the individual working through them. I believe the call of the Earth crying was heard.

James Thornton, a Zen Buddhist student of Maezumi Roshi of the Los Angeles Zen Centre, and a lawyer, answered Roshi's suggestion that he do something about the ecological disasters that were happening in southern California. Moving into the Zen centre as a base, he initiated what was to become a world-wide mission, starting with assisting the legal creation of wildlife corridors in southern California: 'I use a creative process which combines a high degree of analytical skill and input with a creative non-cognitive process.' After days of wrestling with something in his head he said 'for me I use meditation, though taking a hike in nature can do it just as well. You need to go wide in order to see what the problems are and to recognise the field of opportunity that offers a creative solution. That process then allows me to explain what I am doing to non-lawyers.'

He took time out in 1991 to do a 14-month spiritual retreat in Germany. Meditating on how he should apply himself to environmental problems. In a visit to the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, to inquire 'Where to next?' The Dalai Lama advised him 'You become confident and positive, and then you must help others to become confident and positive. The long-term solutions to world problems, including environmental problems can never emerge out of an angry mind.' The words 'you become confident and positive' resonate with me. It is not always easy to speak out when my inner dialogue says 'Who are you? You are just a grandmother.' Just a grandmother, or just a child, or just a bus driver, or whoever, are all part of this great tapestry of life; all have equal responsibility to speak out.

James Thornton's book, 'Client Earth', co-written with his partner Martin Goodman, details this visionary journey,

protecting parts of the world in deep ecological trouble including Africa, Poland, the UK, and China, and including work with the United Nations.

There are many other figures of enormous vision and commitment, such as Polly Higgins, a British Barrister who has for years worked on global environmental jurisprudence, fighting for the law of Ecocide to be included in The United Nations Charter to protect peace in the world. Speaking recently at The Hague Peace Palace on this topic she noted that the recent IPCC Report, and the Paris Agreement are too slow to take effect. She said that only by having Ecocide in criminal law with things move faster.

Closer to home, Dr Anne Poelina, a senior adjunct research fellow at the Notre Dame University in Broome is a Nykina woman working hard to protect her country, and in particular the Fitzroy River. She is also a council member of the Australian Conservation Foundation. Dr Poelina is buoyed by the growing 'Rights of Nature' movement that calls for legal recognition for the ecosystem, natural communities that are not mere property that can be owned, but rather entities that have an independent right to exist and flourish.

Dr Poelina brought a similar case to a recently formed 'Tribunal for the Rights of Nature' for the Fitzroy river to have a protective management plan, including a buffer zone, to have it in an UNESCO Global Park. This tribunal was established by the Australian Earth Laws Alliance, AELA, to provide a forum to challenge the current legal systems failure to protect the health of ecosystems and to highlight the role that the legal system, government agencies, and corporations play in destroying the Earth community. As yet it does not have legal force, and the current federal government has no appetite to legislate for this at present, Dr Poelina says. But proponents are hopeful that it will one day be adopted in law.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of climate change. The following is taken from the Buddhist section of the document ARRC (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change).

At one level it's true that each of us can only do a little, yet as communities and movements, we have the real possibility of standing up against the forces which would destroy much that sustains life on Earth. The stakes are high. For Buddhists complacency is not an ethical option. If, as Buddhists we live according to the Dharma then we have reason to be hopeful. The Dharma is the true nature of all things - we are inseparable from nature. It is inevitable that our good actions now will give good results in the future, however small.

We follow the example of the Buddha and many inspirational teachers and disciples down the ages who persevered on the middle way of abandoning all greed and ill-will to follow and teach by their words and example, a path of simplicity, harmlessness and compassion for all living beings.

We may feel that we don't have much to offer but we see many examples of how one dedicated person can achieve great things. We have as models those believers who helped transform the societies of their own time: Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and many others. They engaged with the moral issues of their own societies and brought with them the values of their faith. We likewise are challenged in our own time, in whatever ways we can, to act on our deepest beliefs.

So how can we respond from our spiritual base to the suffering of those in the human and non-human world, caused by our greed and ignorance? We can demonstrate in our own lifestyles that we care deeply about our planet and its future.

Some of us have formed a new group called BFE. We take action with the Buddha Dharma as a base. In the east of Australia spiritual environmental activism appears more advanced than here. Zen Roshi Susan Murphy is very active and has written a book 'Minding the Earth, Mending the World'.

The Buddhist Action Kit put out by ARRCC from the Eastern states mostly, although one member of our new BFE group, Annie Keating, a former Buddhist nun from Perth was involved in the initial drafting of this document.

Insight Meditation teacher, Steve Armstrong sent me The Dharma Teachers Collaborative Statement about Climate Disruption. Buddhists in the USA are taking serious action. In that document a path towards solution is outlined as threefold: personal, communal, systemic.

- First, we must each live with greater mindfulness and moral integrity, which entails curbing our desire for material acquisitions, being frugal in our consumption of resources, and paying more attention to our use of energy.
- Second, we must engage our friends, neighbours and community in honest and peaceful dialogue, to ensure they understand the gravity of our situation and are willing to join us in action.
- And third, we must be ready to act at the systematic level by seeking sustainable alternatives to the deep structures - social,

political, and economic - responsible for climate change.

People do care, and things are also happening at a practical level. People everywhere are acting: forming movements to demand that government, corporations, banks, universities, local councils and other organisations as well as individuals divest from the highly polluting and powerful fossil fuel industry.

Faith groups are getting together to act. I recently attended a forum at the Perth Anglican Cathedral, hosted by the Archbishop, chaired by Carmen Lawrence and one of the passionate speakers was Tim Winton. The subject was fracking.

A national group, Doctors for the Environment is very active here in Perth. I attended a symposium put on by them at Fiona Stanley Hospital. Prof. Stanley was a keynote speaker on the health risks of global warming.

The Sustainable Town movements are growing across the world, including here in WA.

Farmers are rising up to protect their livelihoods and our food bowls and joining with activist groups mostly based in cities, but also forming their own support networks. A number of you here will have taken part in the non-violent actions to preserve the wetlands threatened by the Roe Highway extension. Lizzie is involved in the rehabilitation of the saved land by undertaking weeding, sometimes on her own.

Renewable energy from sun wind and other sources, and battery storage are burgeoning across the world rather than the extractive resources which are so injuring our planet and all of life.

People are pressuring politicians to hear and understand the importance of what must happen if we are to survive even this century. More-over through our practice we can tap into the deep universal wisdom that lies within all of us.

The ZGWA Sits on Country

KATHY SHIELS

Hovea, December 16, 2018.

Kaya, wanjoo nganyang kwerl Kathy.

Hello, welcome. My name is Kathy.

Ngulluck koorling nyin-iny dwonk kaditj kadidiny Nyoongar wirin Nyoongar boodja karla boodja.

We gather here together to sit, to listen and learn about Nyoongar spirituality on Nyoongar boodja - our boodja.

Thank you, Michael for bringing the Noongar language and culture to all of us in the Zen Group of WA (ZGWA) over the past two years, and I trust that you and the elders with us today, Aunty Oriel and Aunty Minyaloo, understood my fledgling and rather clumsy attempts at your precious ancient language. It is personally moving to make these attempts and I look forward to learning more from you over this time of dialogue and reciprocity.

I'm honoured to speak today at the invitation of our weekend's convenors: Dr Michael Wright, a Yuat Noongar man from the Moora and New Norcia area, who holds a fellowship position at Curtin University and Ross Bolleter Rōshi, the senior teacher of the Zen Group of WA; a well-known musician and composer. I'd like to tell the story of the how the family connection between Michael and Ross has opened up the unique track that we within the ZGWA tread together to 'Sit on Country', on boodja, every month at Kaarta Gar-up (Kings Park).

It was some years ago that Ross met Michael at an extended family dinner. During the evening's socialising they discovered each other's passion for the Dharma and while Michael was a long time Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, he had heard of and read Ross' first book: 'Dongshan's Five Ranks: Keys to Enlightenment'. At that dinner, Ross was delighted to be introduced to one of Michael's good friends, a Jesuit priest devoted to Aussie Rules. As you can understand the alchemy was flowing towards a mutually nourishing friendship. A 'coffee catch up' was set for soon after their first meeting.

A lively discussion of all manner of things was enjoyed over the coffee, but a pivotal moment was when Michael spoke of how, since the early days of colonial settlement, the boodja has spoken and drawn folk to sites for building churches and hospitals. Ross was intrigued and

encouraged. He became even more enthusiastic while they walked through Subiaco together, after their coffee that afternoon, when he saw the number of Noongar people known and greeted by Michael.

Ross in turn invited Michael to meet his special kin – his family of pianos at his home in Bayswater. Michael felt 'right at home' there and loved the pianos. Not too long afterwards, he invited Ross to teach meditation to his university staff and suggested they meet at Kaarta Gar-up. I recall the joy Ross expressed at having the rare and curious experience of teaching Zen meditation to Noongar people at Kaarta Gar-up.

In turn, Michael, and his partner Fiona, decided to experience a deeper 'taste of Zen' by attending a Zazenkaï at St Paul's dojo in 2016. From that day on, Ross acknowledged their presence by inviting Michael to give a 'Welcome to Country' at the beginning of Zazenkaï and before talks in the dojo. It was at that time that so many of us first heard the very essence of Zen expressed in Australia's first language; with Michael's concluding refrain of:

Debekan...Debekan...Debekan
(Steady...Steady...Steady).

The resounding bond filled the air of St Paul's and we all breathed deeply, in humble respect for what has always been here – in the midst of the first nation's people. Michael was keenly sought out for informal discussions at the end of our activities at St Paul's and, at Ross' invitation, he agreed to give a talk on Noongar Spirituality and Zen Buddhism on the 3rd November 2016. Many of Michael's words from that night are still very vivid for me today and I'd like to share some which are at the heart of our monthly Sit on Country:

This country is alive, for it breathes and moves and if you can find that connection it will reveal itself to you...

There is an understanding from within, knowing where you are, feeling and experiencing the boodja, not as something inert, but something that is pulsing and alive...

When you are ready, the country makes itself visible. The country, boodja, decides when to reveal its secrets.'

At the end of his talk Michael made the generously bold statement to the group when he said:

So much in Australia could be learnt if people sat on country more. When we sit on country, the country heals us and we heal the country. I'll sit on country with anyone!

Immediately after those words concluded his talk, a number of us gathered around Michael ready to take up his invitation.

We each said: 'I'll sit on country with you, Michael.'

We felt tremendously privileged to be invited to sit on country with a Noongar man. Without a moment's hesitation, Michael responded by nominating a regular time and place: 'The first Sunday of each month, at Kaarta Gar-up.'

The group has not missed a month since then in over two years and it has been life changing. As a young child, I was immersed in my father's stories of his Aboriginal playmates and the stockmen who taught him to ride a horse when his mother worked as a cook on a station up north. Growing up near the beach, I'd spent many hours, in all seasons, lying, sitting and playing on the sand. Then in my teens and early adulthood I'd unwittingly taken refuge on the earth soaking up its healing force during emotional maelstroms. With 'Zen Mind Beginner's Mind' in my pack, I first tried Zazen on a rocky ledge in Greece. In more recent years I'd sat outside with my dog; on Granite outcrops or the ground. But for several years, I'd 'forgotten' to sit on the earth and I hadn't been to Kaarta Gar-up, with its magnificent sweeping views of the Swan River, for many more years.

I believe that sitting on country there, with Michael and the group, has brought about wonderful lifestyle changes. I have more commitment to protecting country and I've relocated to live nearer to the Swan River where I can swim, sit and walk on ancient indigenous pathways to

observe and learn about the six seasons as taught to us by Michael, at Kaarta Gar-up.

Through the practice of Sit on Country we enter the more intimate and healing reality of the boodja, with its seasonal shifts and myriad forms. The Sit on Country lifts us from our habitual blinkered reality of going for walks or sitting in nature in the mode Dōgen describes as 'carrying ourselves forth'; those times when we chat about our lives with our friends, comment on sights or creatures as we go, or walking or sitting alone, stay in the landscape of our preoccupations.

But to return to the story of how the ZGWA came to be sitting on Country...

Following Michael's talk in the dojo on the 16th November 2016, the ZGWA's first Sit on Country was advertised in the group's newsletter and took place on the 27th November 2016. Ross arrived early to greet Michael and sit beside him as 'the form' was established.

At 9:15am folk gathered quietly in the morning sunshine. Michael invited us to sit beneath some venerable Marri trees in an arc, facing the river. We were on the hillside not far down from the war memorial, the lookout and café, full of tourists. Michael welcomed us to country and to Kambarang, the season (how fitting that Kambarang is the season of birth). He spoke of his family's connection to Kaarta Gar-up, shared stories of his culture and introduced us to the Noongar language by naming those that flew above us, called loudly from branches nearby or strutted curiously towards us: Wardang (Crow), Koorlbardi (Magpie), Djiti Djiti (Willy Wagtail) and more.

That first morning 'the new ZGWA form' came into being and it has continued since with the number of Sangha members attending (sometimes with friends and family members) increasing and not once have we needed to take refuge from inclement weather! Nowadays, we sit a little further across the slope in front of a huge granite outcrop.

Folk in mufty (informal clothes) gather in the arc on cushions or chairs and chat quietly till Michael gives the welcome and offers words, which are often about the season, as he encourages us to feel the boodja for ourselves. Three bells are then rung by the Jiki and we do two 25 minute rounds of Zazen with Kinhin (often in bare feet) in between. Zazen - in sun speckled shade as the breeze offers bird calls, speedboat engines, comments from, dog walkers, camera clicking tourists and little children - brings a half smile to our faces:

'Daddy, what are they doing?'

‘They’re meditating Sophie, so let’s be quiet.’

At the end of the second round, there’s no rush to move and eventually Michael asks if anyone has a comment or question. A gentle conversation usually happens and once it’s wound down ‘the form’ is to adjourn to the nearby café overlooking the city to share coffees or breakfast at a large round table where folk get to know each other more in the nourishing presence of ‘Sangha relations becoming complete.’

Ross, our teacher, has continuously fostered the group’s Sit on Country. After the first, in November 2016, he emphasised the significance of the Buddha’s gesture of touching the earth and calling it to bear witness to his awakening. In his Dharma talk on 8th December 2016, to commemorate and celebrate the enlightenment of the Buddha, Ross said:

I want to return to Shakyamuni under the Bodhi tree, in particular the time when demonic forces tried to unseat him, because their king, Mara, claimed that place under the Bodhi tree. As they proclaimed their leader’s powers, Mara demands that Gautama produce a witness to confirm his spiritual awakening. The Buddha simply touched the earth with his right hand...

The Buddha’s gesture of touching the earth and calling it to bear witness also shows the indissoluble connection that each of us – that we all have – to the earth as our true and timeless nature. When we realise that nature, and our dependence on the earth itself, we also comprehend that we have responsibilities to the world and to each other.

Ross and Michael have rarely missed a Sit on Country. It is a joy to feel the warmth and comradie of their kinship as they laugh, chat and sit in deep stillness beside each other on boodja - as boodja. On the 4th March 2017, I was fortunate to be with them on the foreshore of the Swan River, at Matilda Bay. I sat in the midst of the bond between Ross and Michael sharing their insights during an interview I had been invited to conduct.

It was a sunny Saturday morning. We were sitting under some Peppermint trees close to the shore with children paddling and many walkers nearby. Wardang and Koornbardi called loudly. The full tape script of the interview has been previously published in the Wobbly Pot (early 2018), but I would like to close this talk with two extracts which I believe are appropriate for our time here. Towards the end of the interview Ross said:

We turn up to bear witness; we turn up to simply be here with it. Sitting on Country is just like this. In the talk I described it as ‘geared towards healing’. I think that’s what we hope in our heart; to simply be there with what is, which is not only the present moment of river and children’s voices. All the time that has ever been leads to this. Healing may come from that, and one would hope that it does, or that it’s a tiny first step. But I think it’s wrong to presume that by simply taking action it accomplishes something of itself. Zazen teaches patience. It’s not an escape from the responsibility of action. But it’s the ability to simply wait on situations...to not be trying to force the issue constantly, but be open to what is. Bearing witness, yes. I am deeply grateful to you Michael for providing this opportunity for us to Sit on Country.

And some of Michael’s concluding remarks seem a fitting way to close this talk:

We heal, and country heals us. We get a better understanding about what country is. Not through words, but through the experience of sitting, because all of this is experiential. I can only take you to the place, I can’t give you the experience of the place. That’s your experience.

Thank you for listening and see you at the next Sit on Country!



Kaarta Gar-up. Wikimedia Commons

The Long River - A Planetary Journey Towards Sustainability

MARK EDWARDS

Hovea, December 16, 2018.

Zen and the environment and climate change....to start things off I need to say I am not a climate change expert. I am not a natural scientist. Like any of you, I get my information from the experts. My expertise comes in the scientific investigation of the mindsets and perspectives that give rise to things like climate change. I have always been interested in the issue of human perspectives, the way we look at things and how that impacts on the real world of things and of people. And I guess this comes from my history. I grew up in the country and when I was a little boy, I lived a Huckleberry Finn kind of childhood, playing in country creeks and paddocks and I know what it's like just to head off and get lost in some bush and to play endlessly. And I think this is a very interesting theme for many of us. We have that connection of just playing as young people. I don't think that ever leaves us. And I think it's the same for kids who don't necessarily have much bush to play in. I think there is an innate, inbuilt grounding that we have a love of nature, a love of country and love of the complexity of the natural world and I definitely had that connection very much in my childhood.

I actually wanted to study biology at university and so I went off to La Trobe university in Melbourne and enrolled in a biology course there and it bored me to tears. It was all about taxonomy and labelling all living things and I just hated it. We never went out of the classroom, there were no field trips. It was awful. But I didn't change to some other course because I was of the first generation to go to university in my family, so I didn't know what the process was. So, I thought, 'OK, I don't like this course, I'll just hang round the university and read stuff until I fail it at the end of the year.' I was 17 and I started reading the philosophy and comparative religion shelves in the Arts library. I read everything from 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' to 'The Bhagavad Gita' to people like Noam Chomsky and all this incredibly eclectic bunch of topics and that is where I really found what interests me. What interests me is the way we look at things, how we look at

stuff. And I think what we make of the world, what we make of facts.

The big problem with things like climate change has not been establishing the facts, the big problem is the psychology and the mindsets behind what we make of it. And people are very easily confused when it comes to facts. How we decide what is factual is complex and difficult and we can be very easily confused when there are contradictory ways of looking at things we experience and observe. And when we are confused, we don't take action. Robert Heinlein, a great science fiction writer, said, 'People are not rational animals, they are rationalising animals.' We do stuff and then we find reasons for why we did it. We rationalise our actions. We often act in ways which are like 'that's the way we have always done things', and then we come up with reasons for supporting those particular actions. So, it's very difficult for us to change. When we are confused, when there is contradictory evidence, we very easily find reasons for inaction and it then becomes extremely difficult to take action. This is called the problem of collective action.

It is very difficult for people to change once we get into a pattern. There is this standard joke in psychology, 'What's the difference between people and rats?' The difference is that rats can change their behaviour and people can't. At this moment, we are faced with a global challenge that demands change. We have this dilemma, for the first time in history we see that we have changed the state of the planet and that we can no longer do this out of ignorance. We now know that the challenge of global sustainability requires nothing less than global transformation in the way the economy runs, the way we think about what is good for people, the way we measure what is good for people, for societies and so forth, all these big, big issues. We are realising that we must transform as a global society. And this is a very interesting challenge.

What I would like to talk about is, first of all, the fact that things are going to change in very dramatic ways. It's very

easy sitting here with these wonderful surrounds to say, 'Yes, there are these big problems', but it is not easy to do something about them. Just to give you a little idea. The situation of Syria is a little glimpse into our future. In Syria between 2007 and 2011 they had the deepest drought ever recorded. And more than two million Syrian farmers were driven off their land because of the climate change triggered drought and they all went to the cities where they were forced into camps. While there are lots of cultural issues for Syria's war, climate change did accelerate and amplify the conflict there. When these two million farmers and their families went into the cities in Syria, what they found was rising food prices on all the staple foods, on bread and basic types of grain. And those food prices were caused because Europe was trying to address climate change. Europe had its carbon trading scheme, and one very easy way for Europe to reduce its fossil fuel usage, its carbon emissions, was to shift from fossil fuel at the gas pump to bio-fuel. The EU policies meant that a lot of agricultural production capacity shifted from human food production into bio-food production and that caused a massive spike in food prices in 2010 and 2011 and all this kicked off the Arab Spring and lead directly to the Syrian war. This is an example of how these systems are completely interdependent at a global level. You cannot solve climate change or poverty or land use problems or poverty or overfishing – you cannot solve any of these problems in isolation from each other. They are completely intertwined. We cannot solve these problems through rational decision making, strategic targeted plans, in the same way that we solved the CFC problem for the ozone layer. That was a very clear, specific problem that could be solved globally. But these other issues are 'super-wicked problems', complex beyond belief and the only way to solve them is by fundamentally shifting values and mindsets and ways of looking at the world, ways of understanding what human purpose is. And there will be no solution to these problems without that transformation.

The only other solution will be a very hard route. Many of you will have heard of the idea of 'the invisible hand', this is a famous metaphor from Adam Smith way back in the 18th century, who proposed that markets would coordinate themselves through the invisible hand of individual people seeking their own self-interest. So if, as agents in a market, if we seek our own self-interest and everyone has access to the information in the market, everyone has equal access and potential to buy and sell in the market – if you have all of these assumptions in place, the invisible hand of the market will efficiently produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. And it's a very interesting idea and I think it's a very valuable contribution to the ideas that we have had around social governance and how to run civilisation and society. If you just consider for a moment that this invisible hand seems

to coordinate the daily capacity of a city like Perth to meet its needs and that of the great majority of its inhabitants. No one plans how much food, water, energy or anything like that, is required to meet the daily needs of the population of Perth and yet it runs remarkably smoothly. There is no individual, there is no body of people deciding any of that. In a sense, this invisible hand of the market is coordinating this stuff at a level of efficiency that is remarkable. The same goes for the global economy and the needs of whole countries. It is a huge and incredible achievement of contemporary societies to achieve some of these things.

But I also mention to my students another reality that might be symbolised by the metaphor of what I call 'the invisible foot'. The invisible foot is growing reprimand of Mother Nature reminding us that we are grounded in the earth and in nature and in natural systems. The invisible foot is beginning to give us a series of almighty kicks up the bum, reminding us that she is the ultimate measure of wealth and of resource coordination. The invisible foot is already prodding in some ways and it is unfortunately it is often the poorest people, the most vulnerable people, who get kicked, who feel that kick first. The rich can, at least to some degree, shield themselves from the effects of degraded natural systems but the poor cannot. One example of this is that women in Africa are needing to walk twice as far as they ever did 10/15 years ago to get water for their family and they often spend several hours a day walking to get water. This is an example of the impact climate change is having on some of the poorest communities and countries, usually around equatorial regions. I tell my students that assuming things will continue as they are now is very misguided and that we need to broaden our understanding of how these systems interact and how they impact on human societies. So, it is very important that we look at Syria and see a little glimpse into our future.

We are in a situation where we cannot avoid massive impact on fundamental systems and how those impacts will spill over into economic and social aspects of how society runs. It is not the temperature that is the problem. Once when I flew to Sweden it was 35°C in Perth and minus 15°C in Stockholm, there was 50 degrees difference. In both places, humanity was flourishing. It's not the temperature that is the problem, it's the impact of temperature on fundamental systems on which we depend, the stability and resilience of the natural and social systems on which we depend. When these systems have a little shake, when they do not bounce back so quickly from some shock, the repercussions spill out into human communities and cascade into mass movements of disruption and dislocation. This dislocation has already come but we and our media don't see it. But I don't think it will take too many years before it becomes very obvious.

Can you imagine what happens when the rains fail in Java with over 100 million people? When the Himalayan glacial melt stops and five of the world's biggest rivers start to falter. One quarter of the world's population directly depends on those rivers, and those glacial melts are in a very difficult state. This source of fresh water is incredibly vulnerable to climate variation and they will falter in coming years if we do not change our ways rapidly. When these rivers falter in their provision of fresh water, it won't be five million Syrians causing a lot of political and economic and social change in Europe and America, it will be 200 million people from Pakistan, India, Indochina, and Bangladesh and on the move across the planet. These sorts of changes will completely destabilise economic and social systems across the planet. With our current 'business as usual' mode of thinking about these possibilities there is no possibility of avoiding these kinds of rolling social disruptions. From my understanding of the science, by the end of this century there is no way that we can avoid these sorts of shifts, global shifts in populations and the associated shift in economic changes.

So, what do we do with this sort of understanding of possibility and the high likelihood of these sorts of global destabilisation? In terms of my research and my teaching, the way I look at this is that we are at the start of a great transition. And it's a transition where we need to build resilience and build new understandings and maybe discover some old understandings or rediscover them, to see what our place is on this very fragile planet. It is almost inevitable that, given some basic characteristics of who we are as human people on this planet, that this situation was going to arise somehow. I think once humanity reached the point of incredible technological capacity and ethical regard for each person, that each life was sacred. It was almost inevitable that we would reach a position where we faced these sorts of big global sustainability challenges. Consequently, the challenge that we have to transform in these fundamental ways, is not something that is unexpected in a sense. It is almost that we have this opportunity as part of our growth and development as humanity on this planet to face up to these massive dilemmas.

There are a number of pathways that I feel are available to us in making this journey and I would like to hear your own thoughts about where you see us moving in terms of personal approaches to these things at a community level or the big picture of humanity or however you want to look at it; I would be interested to hear what your thoughts are about this. One avenue I see, and there are powerful signs of this in recent research, is that we are starting to understand the level of sophistication and skill and wisdom of indigenous cultures in how they viewed, facilitated and designed the ecological systems they lived in. This will continue and increase radically and we will

globally start to value our traditional people's science and sustainability capacities with some urgency and start to respect the incredible knowledge, but beyond knowledge, the fundamental values and mindsets that indigenous cultures hold in their relationship with nature. I've written a couple of articles on this topic with some wonderful indigenous scholars at UWA and did some interviews with some elders from the Kimberley. And the message that I got through this work (I'm not an indigenous scholar or anything like that, very much a novice) was that there are parallels between indigenous wisdom and some of the new approaches to organisational management that are emerging in the scientific literature. For example, one message that came through to me was that there are some very fundamental indigenous principles that we need to embody in our own worldviews. One version of these was told to me by this Kimberly leader. He said that there were three fundamental principles that he and his family and clan up there worked from: everything is alive, meaning everything; everything is connected and that connection is powerful; and everything is sacred. This doesn't mean that you can't do anything but what it does mean is that every action that you take is based on the sacredness, the connectedness of everything and that everything is alive and this has very strong implications for the way we make decisions. I think the transformation of our culture needs to be based precisely on discovering and embedding in our own decision-making, in our own lives, our own cultures, our organisation, something like these three principles and discovering the ethic that flows from these principles and which guided indigenous people in their relationship with country.

The relationship between indigenous people and the land is hugely misunderstood. We have this ridiculous idea that Indigenous people wandered through the wilderness passively spearing a kangaroo or something and picking a fruit here and there, living off the bounty of nature. This is a complete misunderstanding. Indigenous people managed and facilitated and designed their country as meticulously as any modern organisation has planned or designed or managed anything. The level of sophistication and control and power of Indigenous people was extraordinary. They changed the whole continent of Australia from top to bottom, left to right. And they designed templates for hunting, for ceremony, for travel, for recreation. They built the environment, the landscape and they did it for tens of thousands of years with incredible technological power of firestick technology and water coursing and a range of very powerful technologies. And they could have destroyed the whole shebang. Australia could have been completely ruined if they got it wrong because Indigenous people were here for so long and there were so many of them and they lived here with a lot of power and strength to change the country. But they didn't. At the end of their 60,000 years of continuous

occupation of the continent, the result was a diverse, rich, bountiful continent. So much so, that when the whites rolled up here and let their cattle and their sheep run wild, those cattle and sheep prospered because of the incredible richness that Indigenous people had built up here in the landscape, in the soil and in the pasture. The two most common terms that adventurers and explorers used in describing the Australian countryside was 'a gentleman's park' in that everything looked beautiful, manicured, cared for, and 'an estate' in that everything looked designed and planned out. These two terms pop up all the time in the explorers' notebooks. The country was beautiful, you could move through it easily. It was manicured and it wasn't simply some passive relationship, the Indigenous people had power and the capacity to do this. And we need to discover and find and embed into our own understandings the ethics and the values and the spirituality that lay behind this incredible capacity to allow nature to flourish while planning for our needs. Now Indigenous people could have settled if they had wanted to, but they chose not to. They wanted to care for their land, to have that relationship with their land, this intense relationship. They chose to move through the country caring for it. This is my understanding and I would be interested to hear from our elders here if I am getting it wrong in some way. This is one avenue that I see coming up for helping us to make this transitional journey in the next decades. That we have this source of Indigenous knowledge, I think will become ever more important.

There is another avenue for navigating this journey in the coming period, and this other avenue is to be seen in the communal energy and enthusiasm to achieve these sorts of changes. The author and social entrepreneur, Paul Hawkin, who wrote that great book 'The Ecology of Commerce' many years back, also wrote a subsequent book called 'Blessed Unrest' which documents his encounter with literally thousands of community organisations all over the world. And he makes the judgement, and he's probably right, that this is the largest human movement in world history, and it's a movement of people at a community level to change the way we think and do things. These organisations can be about the environment or social justice or animal welfare or looking after each other, neighbourhood-based organisations. They include social innovation, social enterprises, NGOs, community organisations, charities, neighbourhood groups and they can be about transitioning to sustainability, welcoming migrants, developing technological solutions for saving energy, they can be about setting up new social businesses that provide solar cells to poor communities in India and so on. There are literally hundreds of thousands of these organisations across the world and these organisations will seed the new societies that will come from the present ones.

Seeding these sorts of changes, bringing new mindsets, new philosophies and new values to our current communities and organisations is incredibly important. From these seeds new possibilities for addressing the fundamental problems of that generate problems like climate change will emerge. Climate change, by the way, is not the worst of our problems, it's biodiversity loss and it's loss of the natural systems that underpin all our modes of life. Climate change is just one example of the kinds of social-ecological shifts that we must urgently address and it is becoming very late to take action on these problems. The people who know about climate change and the radical steps we must take to deal with are becoming extremely anxious about the situation. These researchers are starting to express signs of exasperation and desperation. I've seen some of the world's top climate change researchers weep in publicly expressing this frustration and the reality is I think totally unavoidable in terms of the level of changes we must take to address climate change and the other global sustainability challenges. I encounter this issue with my students because they suffer from depression and anxiety because they understand the science and the possibilities it points to. They do the reading and they know what's in store. They have done their homework. And yet I think it's incredibly important that we recognise the capacity for change that humanity is capable of. That we discover new ways forward in learning from our wonderful Indigenous cultures, in being inspired by the energy, enthusiasm and vision of our young people and in recognising the contributions of the many, many businesses that are starting to change in very dramatic ways. There are huge possibilities here and they will make an immense contribution to the challenges that we are facing. And so, I would like to hear from you to see what your thoughts are on these sorts of issues. Thank you.

Waking Up to the Need for Action: Intimate Encounters With Birds of the Wetlands and Roe 8 Highway Bushland

LIZZIE FINN

Hovea, December 16, 2018.

Listening to birdcall.....anyone here who has sat in meditation will be familiar, very familiar with the sound of birdsong. For me it is a welcoming and often beautiful sound, a soothing sound like being comfortable at home, a sound of companionship ... Lizzie, the birds...the butterflies, the wind, sun and rain all sitting.....

When I started to think about what I would say in this talk, I realised what a large part birds and their song, and the songs of trees and bushes, the wind and the rain, indeed the sound of space itself, has occupied in my Zen meditation practice. This started with the first koan Ross gave me to practice with 'Who is hearing this sound?' I listened, listened and listened for a long long time and that was the beginning for me of waking up – paying attention to birdsong and many sounds, constantly offers me the opportunity to return to my true home in the here and now.

Today there is always the sound of birds from where I sit at home with open doors... magpies, crows, honey-eaters, red-tailed black cockatoos, galahs, their many calls filling the air. When I leave for work, head down and hurrying, a bird call from the bush outside my home enters straight into my heart, intense, alive, just this! I have had some wonderful experiences sitting on my zabutan looking through sliding glass windows into my garden which is full of plants, bushes and trees, and attracts birds, bees, butterflies, ants, skinks, beetles, cockroaches, caterpillars and more.... being caught in the present as a huge grey caterpillar traverses the garden path rolling over and over and over from one side to the other, and in an endless moment when a tortoise-shell butterfly lands close to where I am sitting and stands flapping and pulsating it's wings (wave arms) up and down, up and down. All sense of a Lizzie disappeared in that moment which slowed right down and seemed to hold us both in mid-air forever in what must have been only a few seconds. This was an intimate experience. In his book 'The Crow Flies Backwards and Other New Zen Koans' Ross Bolleter vividly brings to life the meaning of the word intimacy

referring to the 20th century German Poet Rainer Maria Rilke and his experience of birdsong: 'Spending an hour in the garden a bird-call sounded simultaneously outside and within himself. The bird call seemed to be not refracted on his body but to collect both spheres together in into one continuous space where there remained only one spot of purest and most profound consciousness.'

Somehow or other Zen practice has slowly but increasingly heightened my reverence for all living beings, and with this, compassion has slowly arrived. And I don't see this process as being largely due to learning to abide by our Zen precepts. It is something that has crept up gradually, invisibly, silently, a form of grace that has changed me. I take great care now with all inhabitants of my garden and my house for that matter, putting a glass over red back and hunter spiders to take them out into the garden, rescuing flies, worms, geckos, caterpillars with great tenderness when they fall into my cat's water bowl, or are caught out drying up in the sun. In the 1990s I did not have this awareness and often, with great carelessness crushed snails underfoot on a damp evening, killed spiders brutally through fear with a broom, if I found them at home, and stomped on cockroaches....ignorance and hatred no less.

So Zen practice for me has been about development of intimacy and growing compassion for the wider Sangha. My talk relates very much to the title of this workshop 'Country Talking: The Dharma of Ecological Engagement'. Dogen who founded the Soto Zen School in the 13th century described his own awakening as realising that 'the mind is nothing other than rivers and mountains and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars'. For him others were 'none other than myself' and with this comes compassion and the ability to suffer with others. David Loy, a professor, writer, and Zen teacher in America in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism, is especially concerned about ecological issues. He describes intimacy as the absence of the idea of a separate self or separate other, and specifies that 'when there is just the bird's song, there is intimacy', where

intimacy is simply being open to the immediate experience of every moment and intimacy embraces every-thing. He sees development of intimacy as the way out of our human predicament where we are killing ourselves in the act of destroying the environment.

I am going to talk about my growing awakening through intimacy to the need for action to do something to prevent environmental destruction and related climate change. Apart from Zen practice this has come about due to the opportunities offered in two fairly recent events in my life. One was meeting a man called Mike Sowerby who actually works now teaching in the Aboriginal Centre at Curtin University. When I first met him, he was a counsellor with the Cancer Support Association which my partner David attended. David and Mike became close in the months which followed before David died. Not long afterwards, Mike started inviting me to go kayaking in the wetlands around the Canning River and now around the Serpentine, and still does so every now and again four years later. I love it.....kayaking was a step into the unknown for me and provided access to its riches. On these trips we have encountered magnificent and varied birdlife at very close quarters. The other event was the Liberal Government's decision in 2016 to pre-empt work to extend the Roe Highway which actually was planned to run through bushland within 300 metres of my front door. In December 2016, I became involved with several other Zen group members and many others in attending the successful community protest against the bulldozing and blatant destruction of trees, bushes, the habitat of many birds and other fauna. This destruction went right into the sacred North Lake wetland area which is truly magical and contained a sacred Aboriginal birthing site. At the time the Labour Government in opposition promised to stop the work at a forthcoming election if they got elected and they did get elected, which put a stop to any highway construction work. However, the land will need to be rezoned if it is to be ultimately protected. I have since become involved with a group of women who regularly weed what has become known now as the Community Wildlife Corridor. This is the pathway where the bulldozing took place and now alien weeds are growing there which can strangle the growth of native bushland flora and trees.

(Pic 1) Sunrise Sitting down low in a kayak on the Canning River at sunrise there is only a sense of water splashing quietly, and the close proximity to the banks of the river at various points, the smell and sight of wetland vegetation. (Pic 2) Lizzie in Kayak. A human bird paddles slowly. The birds are not that apparent because they are well camouflaged (Pic 3 of Swamp hen and chick). But spotting a swamp hen with her wonderful red beak and young chick sitting close to each other in their large nest, I cannot help but experience the intimacy between them,

mum and chick, precious life and precious life, no separation between them or me as I sense and feel the tenderness of this moment together.



Swamp Hens. Photograph by Mike Sowerby

These swamp hens can be found in all wetland areas which are defined internationally and nationally as including lakes, swamps, springs and rivers. Wetlands are described as the most biologically productive and diverse habitats on the planet and recognised as important wildlife habitats supporting a wide variety of fauna and flora. Wetlands are threatened across the world. You may have heard Anne Jones on ABC Radio National's 'Off Track' program describing the vast destruction of wetlands in China to make way for industrial development. This means that hundreds of migratory birds are now dying, too weak to reach their destination because the lakes and wetlands where they stopped for rest and refuelling, have been filled up and built on. Closer to home, and I will keep close to home from now on, the magnificent wetlands of Herdsman's Lake, Perth's largest inner metropolitan wetland in the North-West of Perth, have been badly neglected. If you have visited the lake, you will know it is a true treasure and the habitat of a wide variety of WA waterbirds and migratory birds stopping en route to and from Japan. Planning authorities have allowed the building of large wealthy houses right up to the edge of the lake, and the area faces a number of management problems such as polluted and nutrient enriched stormwater and groundwater inputs, areas of disturbance with dumped rubbish, significant weed invasion and the presence of introduced animals. How can this happen? How can we be so ignorant and careless with this priceless natural gift? Nearer to my home, the ingenious 'she'll be right' government planners of the Roe Highway came up with a plan to avoid disturbing native fauna and flora by raising the freeway on stilts which would go right through the lake. Can you imagine what that invasion would be like for this swamp hen and her chick? The most recent WA State of Environment Report states that wetland vegetation on the Swan Coastal plain is being lost or

degraded at the rate of about two football ovals a day and there is rapid declining biodiversity. Wetlands in WA have been dramatically reduced and altered to allow for human settlements, agriculture, water supplies and infrastructure development. These official words from a report cannot, and do not, convey the fact that these amazing birds' homes, and their safety and wellbeing are being ripped away from them without any consideration of their plight, or right to live and breed in their territories.

So...coming back to the birds encountered during kayaking. (Pic of Black Swan on nest). Here is a black swan on the Canning River in her huge nest made of sticks and (Pic swamp hen chick) a swamp hen chick who looks as though he is bursting to leave the nest and explore the world; (Next pic Sea Eagle coming into land x 2). On the Serpentine we witnessed a magnificent sea eagle coming in to land whoooooosh, like lightning! to catch a fish. I was caught in that moment as he sought his prey, landing gear down, precise and spectacular. (Pic Darter drying) And what a wonderful way to dry your wings (flap my open wings) (then Darter reflected and now reflected in the water like the moon. (Pic Darters in nest). As we passed right up close to this nest, the noise of gurgling Darter chicks was rumbling in my throat, I am a bundle of warm feathers pulsating up and down waiting for parents to feed me. (Pic White egret ballerina). I found myself dancing with the waterbirds, like this white egret standing poised like a ballerina watching for fish, and green-winged teal flashing its colours like a Spanish flamenco dancer.

Dogen's Genjokoan states, 'To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening'. When you see forms or hear sounds fully engaging body-and-mind, you grasp things directly. Chao-Chou conveyed this when asked by a monk 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?' Chao-Chou replied: 'Oak tree in the garden'. Huge majestic oak trees, the welcome companions of my years living in England before I migrated to Australia, (twirling around) green ample leaves on branches stretching out to infinity.



Red-Tailed Cockatoo. Photograph by Mike Sowerby



Pelican, egret and shell-duck. Photograph by Mike Sowerby

There is a Zen saying that words do not convey the fact....all of these wetland birds I am about to show step forth right here, right now, just this! Turn each pic over below:

- (Pic) The red-tailed cockatoo...king of the WA forests flying, screeching;
- (Pic) The giant Osprey, king of the wetlands coasting out of the trees;
- (Pic) As well as this Sea Eagle who seems to be wondering where he left that fish;
- (Pic) The gracious and protective Black Swan who has found a different way leaning over backwards to watch and protect her brood of young chicks;
- (Pic) And we can have fun too skittering on the water, egret, shell-duck and pelican;
- (Pic) Whahhhh (arms outspread) gliding is soooooo good....for red tailed black cockatoos;
- (Pic) Well...as a spoonbill I'm not quite a white heron in the mist but can you tell the difference, is there any separation;
- (Pic Black cockatoo eating) Yum ...this is so tasty, I must keep focused....

So...great beauty, and intimacy, the wetland birds....and now I have to ask myself can I really stand back and do nothing to help stop environmental destruction which so direly threatens not just them but me, you, all life on this planet? In her book 'Minding the Earth, Mending the Planet' Susan Murphy Roshi who is a teacher in New South Wales in the Diamond Sangha lineage, likens our current predicament involving this destruction of living beings on our planet, to the Greek myth of King Erisychthon, whose name means 'Earth Tearer'. He decides in his greed to harvest the timber of an ancient forest of oaks sacred to Ceres, goddess of the harvest and the earth's fruitfulness. As he approaches with axe in hand the oak trees shudder

but he lands a mighty blow on the trunk of the largest ancient oak which starts to bleed profusely. He hacks the great trunk apart bringing the sacred oak down with a terrible roar. When Ceres hears of the offense, she finds a nymph called Famine and orders her to punish the King for his desecration. Famine arrives when he is sleeping and kisses his lips and breathes insatiable hunger into his pores. Erisychthon wakes up with an all-consuming rage for food that nothing can satisfy, but the more he eats the greater his hunger. He pours all the wealth of his kingdom into his belly, all the forests, all the animals and plants, all the rivers and the sea and its inhabitants until everything of value has been devoured except his daughter who he then devours. Finally, he tears at his own limbs and devours himself alive. The implication of this story in our 21st century consumerist society is very clear – we are eating ourselves alive!

For many years up to now I have always loved nature, loved trees, loved birds, loved country.... but I had never got to the point of deciding that it was time to stand up and do something to help protect nature. I just listened with an increasingly sinking heart to ongoing news reports about species extinction, dolphins trapped in unclaimed fishing nets, poisoned rivers, and massive destruction of forests and their inhabitants. I had many 'valid' excuses that I put forward which would make perfect sense in an economic rationalist world – I am too busy studying, forging a career, too busy working and making money, too busy running my life whatever that means. I really allowed myself to stick my head in the sand. It was my intimate experience kayaking and then with the bushland in front of my home, that made me decide to do something in any large or small way that I could. Two years ago, the Liberal Government in WA moved in with hundreds of police and security guards to bulldoze the Roe 8 Highway bushland, in front of my home as I described earlier. (Pic Community Wildlife corridor notice) Since then a group of women and affiliated with the Community Wildlife Corridor (set up to preserve this land for future posterity) have met once a fortnight to weed the cleared land. (Pic of bush in front of my home). Here is the bush in front of my home which I have enjoyed for over 20 years. I've always loved it but now I LOVE it! I feel such tenderness towards its resilience, still standing there bearing witness, still growing despite our efforts to destroy it. We are a motley group of weeders in floppy hats who meet early in the morning on a weekend, and work away for a couple of hours with our hands and sacks to pull out weeds which have arrived in this bushland due to the clearing work. These weeds would ultimately prevent native plants, bushes and trees from growing.

As well as a love for the land, this activity is very much one of community, of Sangha, both human Sangha and very much the wider Sangha which we are no less. It is

intimacy itself, We are all Sangha here the Sangha of the bush, trees, insects, birds, and humans, being and working together. We only manage to weed a small area each time over a couple of hours talking and weeding, and sometimes I look on our activity as rather strange given the vast tracts of land that were cleared and our miniscule areas of weeding....but slowly with persistence we have made headway in keeping the weeds down and allowing the bush to flourish as it would have if untouched. Sometimes if I am very busy, I just offer an hour's work with the team and that's fine, that's all I can manage. (Pic 22 Picture of regrowth on Roe 8). It is heart-warming and amazing to see how the bush has regenerated where it was completely razed to the ground, now eucalypts are more than shoulder high, and new plants and bushes of all kinds have re-emerged. The determination of the bush in the face of human destruction is beginningless and endless....it just keeps growing as you can see. Another activity due to start early next year is seed collecting in December. I haven't yet done this, so I am looking forward to learning more in this activity about the bush and its extraordinary ability to survive.



Roe 8 Country. Photograph by Lizzie Finn

Working full time it's easy to wake up on a weeding day and think 'I wish I didn't have to do this, I'd rather stay in bed and catch up on my sleep', but I recall the crashing of trees in 2016 under the tyres of the bulldozers and the screaming of birds. I remember the sacrilege of bulldozers destroying the true magic of the land going right into the wetlands. My heart woke up on that day and I realised 'I have to stand up', I have to stand up for this wonderful bush and its inhabitants which is so vulnerable in the face of steel human machinery, human greed, hatred and ignorance. So standing up....or rather bending over to pull out weeds, is a commitment, a small commitment to doing something about protecting the magnificent bush heritage which nurtures us and all dwelling within it.

I have also made a commitment to attend meetings of the Buddhists for the Environment Group which Trish here founded, and which meets every month at the Buddhist Society for WA in Nollamara. Again, I sometimes feel it's a long haul driving up there, but I recall the wonderful intimacy with wetland birds when kayaking, I can't turn away from that. We are working slowly on various small and manageable projects including one to see if Buddhist teachers in WA are interested in including the threat to the environment and its inhabitants in their teaching, just as our teacher Ross is doing right now.

So, what can be done in the face of such enormous damage to nature? It is easy to despair or avoid but several Zen and other Buddhist sect teachers are now encouraging us to do something, no matter how big or small. A Zen student asked: 'When times of great difficulty visit us, how should we meet them?' The master replied: 'Welcome'. Joanna Macy, Buddhist activist and teacher, encourages us to welcome the opportunity to feel and to engage and to be true, to step into the unknown and make a commitment. She says 'You don't need to do everything. Do what calls your heart: Effective action comes from love. It is unstoppable and it is enough. The work we have to do can be seen as a kind of coming alive. More than some moral imperative it's an awakening to our true nature. Action is something we are. The work we have to do can be seen as a kind of coming alive'. And Zen ecologist David Loy urges us 'to do the very best we can without knowing if anything we do makes any difference whatsoever'.

I'd like quickly to end my talk by paying homage to Mike Sowerby, the hugely skillful bird photographer when we went kayaking. He has evidently missed his true vocation. I asked him to send a picture of him kayaking and in his modest way he said he doesn't have any because he is always behind the camera. (Picture empty kayak). But he sent a picture of his kayak parked up on a river bank where we shared a tasty breakfast of jaffles and tea, another treat, on every trip. (Pic snake). He also sent me these intimate pictures of tiger snakes which he has been photographing in close proximity at North Lakes. I was interested in his courage with these deadly snakes, and wanted to know how he took what we would consider a great risk. He clearly experiences intimacy intuitively. He said, and I quote:

It is important to establish one's presence in the snake's habitat by taking time to be, observe and mutually establish trust...to have one's presence acknowledged by the snake so as not to present a threat. I take time to be, then I lie down and takes those front-on head shots. This can take twenty minutes or so and it's very important to both of us, respect for being in the snake's environment

and the snake feeling safe with my presence. I have an appreciation that I have the opportunity to photograph what is often perceived as an aggressive and frightening snake and yet it has an important place in the wetlands environment. If I didn't feel comfortable, then my sense is the snake wouldn't be feeling comfortable either so I either would wait longer or leave it be.'

Adapting to Climate Change, Caring for Country

INGVAR ANDA

Hovea, December 16, 2018.

My topic for today is climate change adaptation in developing countries. I am going to focus on East Timor where I've lived for a while and done quite a bit of work, but I wanted to try to bring it back to Noongar Boodjar, where we are sitting right now, but I haven't quite got there. I think I might get us back as far as the Pilbara.

I've been working in international development/overseas aid for the last 16 years and in the last few years I have done quite a bit of work on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in developing countries. Quite often, when people depend for their livelihoods on the immediate environment (as most poor people in rural areas do), they are highly vulnerable to existing climate variation as well as the impacts of climate change.

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges of our time but as Mark pointed out in his talk earlier today, climate change is just one of many environmental problems, such as declining biodiversity, collapsing oceans and fish stocks – they are all related.

I think the relating theme is the lack of a right relationship with nature. Industrial civilisation sees the environment as what the German philosopher Martin Heidegger called 'standing reserve', it's just there as stuff to take for our uses. In this world view, a forest is not an entity on its own right, it's so many cubic metres of wood, a river is not an entity in its own right, it's potential units of hydroelectric power. Everything is sort of inert resources to be exploited and I think that's a large part of how we're in this ecological crisis now. Industrial civilisation does not have a right relationship with nature. As a consequence, the environment is collapsing around us.

In the context of climate change it's those communities, indigenous communities and people in developing countries, who are much closer to and dependent on nature who are impacted first and worst. For example, crop failure is becoming more common because it's getting hotter or dryer or rainfall patterns are becoming

more erratic with more extreme rainfall events. Many communities in small Pacific Islands depend on below ground water but quite small rises in sea level can mean saline intrusion into the freshwater lens and suddenly your groundwater is contaminated, and you don't have drinking water. These communities then need to adapt and find a new source of drinking water such as rainwater harvesting.

Poor communities often don't have the financial resources to do that so a lot of climate change adaptation in Pacific Island communities is around these basic questions: how do we get adequate drinking water? how do we grow enough food? really basic day to day considerations.

In the Timor context it's a very harsh environment with quite significant existing climate variability driven by the ENSO cycle, with reduced rainfall and drought during El Nino years and increased rainfall with flooding and landslides in La Nina years. The rains normally come around about now, (November/December), and run through to maybe April. Then you have a very long dry season, so that the crop that you put in now is the crop that you're going to live off for the rest of the year. In some parts of Timor crops fail two years in every five in normal conditions.

As those rainfall patterns get disrupted by climate change it becomes even more difficult for Timorese farmers to grow sufficient food. These are very vulnerable communities. One of the key concepts we work with here is resilience. How is the community going to be more resilient to the existing shocks and stresses they face as well as cope with the impacts of climate change? One of the key principles is working with local organisations and communities as much as possible, building on existing knowledge, because communities have all sorts of traditional knowledge around how to cope in a harsh climate.

Timorese people are essentially indigenous to that island and there are a lot of traditional stories that weave people

into place. Ancestors are very much present in everyday life and animals are sacrificed to appease the ancestors. Before corn is planted a chicken might be sacrificed at the corner of the field to ensure that the crop produces a harvest. You might have a spring up on the side of the mountain which is your water supply for the village. In order to ensure that is going to run all through the dry season you take a cow up there and you sacrifice it to make sure there is enough water. These beliefs and practices are part of a culture that is very different to Western views of the world but you need to understand how you can work together to build resilience into those systems while still respecting the local culture.

One of the systems Timorese cultures have to manage all of these interactions between humans and the environment is a system called Tara bandu, which literally means to hang a prohibition. Tara bandu governs relationships between human and human, between human and animal and between human and environment. It will say where you can graze animals at a particular time where you can grow your crop, which forest you can take trees from, which are sacred and you can't touch. It will also prescribe penalties for transgressions, usually in the form of a fine paid in livestock.

When the Indonesians occupied East Timor, they forbade practices like Tara bandu because it was an animistic practice which was forbidden at the time. Under the Suharto regime there were five allowed religions: Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist. If you weren't one of them you were a communist and if you were communist you were killed. East Timor went from about 90 percent animist to 99 percent Catholic very quickly. Underneath everyone was still animist. So that Abrahamic type of tradition fitted in very well with animal sacrifice.

The first time I was invited to a Tara bandu ceremony (in 2003), I didn't know what I was going to. It was the first time one had been held since before the Indonesian invasion in 1975. I went to the Tara bandu with the head of the local branch of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The ceremony was held in the forest and a cow had been sacrificed and its head was placed on a tripod outside the uma lulik (sacred house). Then the ministry guy gets up and he starts giving a talk, and he's weaving into this talk all these modern land management conservation principles to integrate into this cultural ceremony. I just thought what a fantastic approach, he's from there and he's bringing his university knowledge and mixing it with his cultural knowledge. Merging the practices from that traditional practice plus his scientific knowledge. When I saw one of these ceremonies, I thought this is the ideal cultural platform to do all this kind of sustainable development work.

Tara bandu can be helpful to more effectively manage water. Some communities are starting to say that springs that ran through to the end of the dry are now cutting out a couple of months earlier. It is hard to say it is because of climate change because there are also local environmental factors such as deforestation or it could be changes in the geomorphology because it's a dynamic part of the world, on the edge of the Australian continental plate and the Asian plate (the island of Timor is actually an uplifted part of the outer edge of the Australian continental shelf). The underground geomorphology consists of tiny aquifers that can move around with earthquakes and tremors. It's a very difficult place to attribute something and say this is climate change and this is just local factors but water availability is expected to get worse with climate change, so protecting forests, planting more trees, particularly around upper catchment areas, is part of the solution. Tara bandu ceremonies can give cultural weight to rules around catchment management so development projects need to work with these cultural practices.

Also, planting more resilient varieties of corn is beneficial as corn is one of the major crops. There is a project in Timor called 'Seeds of Life' that was funded by the Australian Government. Technical support was from UWA here in Perth. They did a lot of trials of varieties of corn/maize that would cope with less water. They did trials and when there was a drought year some of the local varieties failed completely. However, new varieties were still yielding a crop. Putting in more resilient varieties that are tailored to the changing climate - already harsh climate - was valuable.

Another promising development is carbon farming. A Melbourne based social entrepreneur helped a local Timorese community group set up a tree farming initiative which has been registered as a voluntary carbon offset program. The carbon offsets are sold to companies that do voluntary offsets. This program is generating 50 cents per tree per year. It's really starting to take off. This one community are getting about US \$70,000 a year from planting trees, growing trees and now they are starting to expand it now that it is proven. (If you want to buy some carbon offsets yourself Google 'WithOneSeed' You get a nice certificate signed by Jose Ramos-Horta. He is the patron of the organisation). Initiatives like this help to deal with climate change and provide income to local communities.

East Timor is very dependent on revenues from oil and gas in the Timor sea. Oil revenue is around 90 percent of the total State budget. The main undeveloped field is called Greater Sunrise and the Timorese government is very keen to develop this field as it will provide decades of income for the Timorese people. If it is dug up and burned

it will also contribute to climate change so it would be good if it could be left in the ground and the Timorese people compensated for the avoided emissions. Timor is in this difficult situation in relation to climate change, it's very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change but it's only source of revenue is to develop these fields of fossil fuels. It would be ok for Australia to lock up coal fields, we will be fine, we won't be impacted significantly, but for Timor they are in this tricky situation with the gas fields. There are no financial mechanisms in place to facilitate paying poor countries to leave it in the ground.

In terms of the mechanisms that are available, I just wanted to look at one of them to start working back from Timor to Australia. The gas field that East Timor gets most of its current revenue from is called 'Bayu undan' (Australia and East Timor share the revenue but the field is closer to Timor). The pipeline runs to Australia and comes in at the Darwin gas plant which is owned by ConocoPhillips. When they were going to put the plant there, they were going to have to clear the whole Peninsula, all the vegetation. The NT Government at time, said to ConocoPhillips that you have to offset the carbon released from the clearing of the vegetation for the plant. You are going to have to calculate how much is going to be emitted then offset it. We have got an offset program that you can fund to offset your emissions. It is the West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement scheme where traditional owners are reintroducing their traditional burning practices that give off less emissions than the unmanaged bushfires that have increased since white settlement.

Bill Gammage in his book 'The Biggest Estate on Earth' documents the continent-wide fire management system that indigenous Australians used before it was disrupted by white settlement. In parts of Northern Australia those systems were still partially in place, certainly the knowledge was still there. In West Arnhem Land, researchers from CSIRO, Charles Darwin University and the Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) had started developing a methodology to calculate the emissions from the current practice of leaving the bush unmanaged, which leads to a high frequency of late dry season fires, massive bushfires, and comparing this to the traditional burning practices, with early dry season, less intense fires. The difference in carbon emissions is very significant. That's what the NT Government said ConocoPhillips would have to fund. They did it in West Arnhem Land in a trial area and they expected the avoided emissions would be 100,000 tons a year and they funded the communities to do that. The fire management was so effective that it exceeded expectations by 30-40 percent.

The other benefits were the community had paid jobs on country. It was a big cultural benefit to the community as they were able to be on country to do traditional ceremony and do it as a part of a recognised job. There were also biodiversity benefits, after uncontrolled fires were reduced by better fire management. After a while there were emus appearing on that area that hadn't been seen for decades, so the land was recovering. That system was an extraordinary example of how governments can take action to say you can't clear this area without compensating for that ecological damage through fixing it somewhere else.

The indigenous fire management that is so effective in West Arnhem land is what indigenous people have done in Australia since the beginning of time. Now that there is a scientific methodology for measuring the avoided emissions it can be replicated across northern Australia where there is high vegetation cover but little economic activity. Qantas is starting to fund these types of projects through its voluntary emissions offset program. We are not going to have carbon free flights for decades but planes are still going to fly. If you buy your plane ticket with Qantas you can choose to offset your emissions, it only adds a few dollars to a transcontinental flight. Qantas has the largest offset program in the world of any airline so it's one of the good ones, relatively. All aviation emissions should be offset but it is currently only voluntary, it is up to the airline to initiate it. One of the projects Qantas funds is an Indigenous fire management project in the North Kimberley that was facilitated by the Kimberley Land Council. Like the West Arnhem Land project, the Kimberley fire project delivers multiple benefits in addition to avoided emissions. These types of projects could be expanded across northern Australia. At the moment there's just a couple of pockets.

Tony Abbot, when he was Prime Minister, described remote Indigenous communities as 'lifestyle choices' and said that the rest of Australia (taxpayers) should not have to fund these lifestyle choices. Caring for country is not a lifestyle choice, it is a cultural identity grounded in place. Indigenous people in northern Australia have the capacity to generate enormous economic returns through carbon abatement programs across northern Australia. Caring for country can be one of the most economically viable activities in northern Australia. One of the most expensive lifestyle choices in northern Australia is cattle grazing. Most cattle stations in the north are uneconomic without various direct and indirect government subsidies, but you don't see Tony Abbot and his ilk calling out this lifestyle choice. Is it because they are mostly run by white settlers?

If we come back to what we are discussing today - Zen practice and caring for country, we can start to see here a different paradigm in relating to nature. If we look at carbon abatement projects as merely a technical solution

to a technical problem, we miss the bigger picture. From a technocratic perspective there are carbon emissions and we have to reduce those carbon emissions, if we are to avoid dangerous climate change. Indigenous fire managers are better managers of fire and have done it far more efficiently than what has replaced it since white settlement - poorly managed rangelands with out of control bushfires. Reintroducing indigenous fire management is an obvious rational response to a problem. That's just looking at it from a technical perspective, the deeper thing that's happening here is those communities have a right relationship with nature. They're not just using fire more effectively they are caring for country, that is their life. That particular project is technically very efficient but I think there is a deeper learning to be had for the rest of Australia. It's not just about fire management it's about how to care for country, how to have a right relationship with nature.

I've got us back as far as the Kimberley. I have one story which ends us up in the Pilbara. It sort of relates to climate change but mainly it's a different way of viewing the world. I just wanted to finish with that. I used to work in Vanuatu on a disaster risk reduction project funded by the European Union. We were working with remote communities who face a lot of cyclones. (Vanuatu is one of the most cyclone prone countries on earth). I asked some old people on some of the islands about their traditional cyclone preparedness strategies. They said 'well we have these magic men and when the cyclones coming we knock it away'. I asked what about when it gets to another island and he said 'well their magic men got to deal with it'. So you have this kind of cyclone ping pong through the Archipelago. So whenever a cyclone would come through Vanuatu I checked the tracking map - are they really doing that?

I was telling my father-in-law this story because my father-in-law and mother-in-law were anthropologists in the East Pilbara in the 50s and 60s and they worked with the Nyangumarda people. They spent a lot of time out there and when I told John this story he said 'ahh when I was out at Strelly there was an old man and he had this little bag that he always hung onto and he was very careful with it. One day he got it out, opened it up and a feather came out and he quickly grabbed it and put it back in the bag and said 'bloody hell that was lucky the last time that got out it took out Onslow'.



Darter Drying Wings. Photograph by Mike Sowerby