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vajrabell

*spreading the dharma
keeping sangha connected*

Climate Crisis: 'It's really happening'

Anālayo: Grounding Our Activism in Ethics and Compassion

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20 Suggestions for 'Dealing with Overwhelm'

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The *Vajra Bell* is an online and print publication featuring articles on the dharma teachings and practices of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community in the U.S. and Canada. It is published by the Aryaloka Buddhist Center in New Market, NH, USA, once or twice a year.

In each issue, you will find insightful articles on dharma topics, reflections and practices from our Triratna Buddhist Centers in North America, reviews of Buddhist books along with poetry and artwork created by sangha members.

Each issue is available for download in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format or can be viewed online on the Aryaloka [website](#) or The Buddhist Centre [online](#).

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The background of the page is a photograph of a vast, dry, cracked landscape under a bright sun setting behind a range of mountains. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and casting a warm, golden light across the scene. The foreground is dominated by a dense network of deep, dark cracks in the parched earth, which contrast sharply with the bright sky and the sun's glow. The mountains in the distance are silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun.

Climate Crisis

‘It’s really happening’

The pandemic and its impact on our lives and well-being and, most recently, racial justice have dominated our headlines and seized our attention. In the midst of these challenges, an issue that remains as critical, and increasingly so, is climate change. As Bikkhu Anālayo said, “It’s really happening.” Before the pandemic struck, we had planned to focus on the climate crisis and what our responsibilities as Buddhists are. We offer reflections in this issue on this question from Anālayo, Vessantara, Gunopeta and Aryadrishti. No doubt, the lessons offered apply to all the difficulties we face in these trying times.

— Editor, *Vajra Bell*

Conversations with Buddhist Teachers in the U.S.

A walk and talk with Anālayo

When I interviewed Sangharakshita a year before his death, he asked me about the state of Buddhism in the U.S. I certainly did not have a short, simple answer to that big question, but it prompted me to begin a series of conversations between Triratna order members and Buddhist teachers in the U.S.

The first of these exchanges is with Bhikkhu Anālayo. Anālayo is a scholar-monk and the author of numerous books on meditation and early Buddhism. He was born in Germany in 1962 and ordained in Sri Lanka in 1995. He currently resides in Barre, MA, where he is a faculty member at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies (BCBS), having retired from being a professor at the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg. His close friend and fellow Buddhist teacher, Joseph Goldstein, invited him to come to Barre, also home to the Insight Meditation Society Retreat Center. The two meet periodically to walk the grounds at Barre and talk dharma.

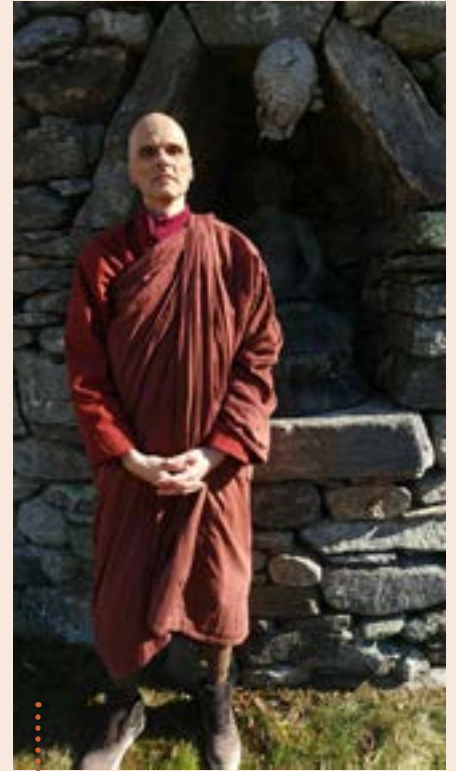
Anālayo's first connection to Triratna goes back "a very long time," he says when he stayed at a Triratna center in India, where he said he helped organize its library. He is one of the first teachers outside of the Triratna order to have his work published by Windhorse Publications. This suits Anālayo's

desire to spread the dharma across the boundaries of traditions. He has become one of the publisher's most popular authors, offering the rare combination of authentic scholarship and deep practice. Three years after the publication of any new work by Windhorse, he is free to make the PDF available online.

His books published by Windhorse include *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, published in 2003, based on his PhD on the Satipaṭṭhāna sutta; *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*; *A Meditator's Life of the Buddha*; *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*; and *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*. In November 2019, *Mindfully Facing Climate Change* was published by BCBS.

Order member Satyada and I interviewed Anālayo in Barre, MA, in November 2019. I had the privilege, too, that month of attending the retreat, "Neurobiology of Compassion and Compassion Practice" with Diego Hangartner and Anālayo at BCBS. The articles in this issue draw on Anālayo's teachings on climate change, our conversation with him and his offerings at the retreat.

— Saddhavasini
Editor, *Vajra Bell*



Anālayo stands in front of the stupa at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre, MA, where he lives.

Photo by Satyada

‘We Are Part of Nature’

Grounding our activism in ethics and compassion



by Satyada

Since reading Anālayo’s book, *Satipaṭṭhāna – The Direct Path to Realization*, I have been drawn to Anālayo’s ability to bring early Buddhist

teachings to modern day practitioners with an accessible clarity. As a Triratna Buddhist Order member, I have been curious about how Anālayo’s work aligns with the teachings of Triratna and Sangharakshita, my teacher and founder of Triratna. With that curiosity in mind, I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet and talk with him.

We met in Barre, MA, on a late fall day and walked through the country roads and New England’s fall splendor. Having recently read his *Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation: A Practice Guide*, I started with Anālayo’s contemplation of the elements within the Satipaṭṭhāna sutta.

“The sense of being different from outside nature, in combination with the conceit of ownership and control, is the chief culprit for many a problem,” Anālayo writes. “It is our responsibility to take care of nature outside just as much as we take care of our own body.”

That passage seems strongly connected to one in Sangharakshita’s *Living with Awareness*: “In our modern techno-scientific culture we are able to do all kinds of things with and to the natural world, but as a result we have lost our affinity with it. Alienated from nature, no longer experiencing it as a living presence, we sorely need to recapture the sense that to be human is to be part of nature.”

Walking through the countryside seemed a perfect place to contemplate our relationship with nature. When I asked Anālayo about this connection,



our conversation turned towards the application of ethical concepts from early Buddhist teachings to pressing modern issues such as climate change.

His book, *Mindfully Facing Climate Change*, was about to be released. The book is accompanied by five videos online – four installments on the Four Noble Truths and the fifth a conversation with his friend and fellow Buddhist teacher, Joseph Goldstein. The book and videos draw on early Buddhist teachings as a way to engage with and respond to climate change.

Reflecting on his talk with Joseph Goldstein, Anālayo talked through ways to ground our environmental activism in fundamental ethical concepts, eventually coming to the grounds of compassionate concern. When we recognize that all human beings require certain conditions to live their lives, and that our personal actions may affect those conditions in harmful ways, we are responsible to act out of compassion for the suffering we cause with our actions.

Anālayo strolled with us along the country lanes leading to Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.

Photo by Saddhavasini

The role of compassion in our social engagement connects our concerns with issues such as climate change, racism, diversity and political turmoil with our Buddhist practice. Anālayo suggested that we need to balance this compassion with wisdom. He used the phrase, “compassion and emptiness, the two wings of the bird,” to reflect this balance.

Mindfulness is the way in which we can achieve this balance, he said. From practicing the Brahma Viharas, we know that compassion arises when we are able to meet suffering within ourselves or others with a desire to relieve that suffering. But when we become too involved in this suffering, we may fall into empathy, the near enemy of compassion, where we take on the suffering of others.

Taking on this suffering is likely to give rise to mental conditions

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Responsibility to Cause No Harm

Mindfulness and compassion are key



by *Saddhavasini*
Editor, Vajra Bell

The sky was a boundless blue with the cold, dry air of late fall. Satyada and I met Anālayo outside the “farm house” of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies (BCBS) in Barre, MA, where he lives. Since Anālayo prefers to walk and talk rather than sit and discuss, we started down the long drive with him to stroll along the country roads and talk dharma.

Downed trees and branches had been cleared from the roadways, remnants of a fierce storm that had come through the area earlier in the week. The storm had a strong, unnatural energy that threw things over, according to Anālayo. “So, it’s really happening,” he said.

The “it” is climate change. Much of our conversation that lasted a little more than an hour dealt with the climate crisis, an issue about which he is passionate. His book *Mindfully Facing Climate Change* was about to be published by BCBS, and he had recorded lectures and guided meditations to supplement the book. All can be found on the BCBS website.

The gravest crisis the planet is facing is climate change, he said. The planet will see more hurricanes, wildfires and irregular weather. The areas for food production are decreasing, supplies of drinking water are being depleted, and the oceans are warming and rising.

We have known these facts for a long time, he said, yet sufficient action is not being taken. As Buddhists, we have a responsibility to cause no harm and to respond with mindfulness and compassion.

Mindfulness is key

Mindfulness is key, he said, to facing what is difficult, such as the climate crisis. “It begins and ends with mindfulness.” Mindfulness is what enables us to be with what is without getting overwhelmed by it and falling into grief or fear.

Anālayo cautions against empathy, taking on the pain of the world, which is a near enemy of compassion. This was a central topic of the retreat I was on with him two weeks after our conversation. He compares the typical responses of humans to climate change – fear, anger and resignation – with the three mental poisons of greed, hatred and delusion that are the root cause of all unnecessary human suffering.

“Fear and grief are not good motivators for sustained action,” he said.

Mindfulness means a willingness to be receptive, to listen and to engage in the open exchange of information. He related a recent visit he had with the dentist, who asked him to let him know if anything bothered him. “And I said, ‘Yes, yes, what bothers me is climate change.’ And we laughed,” he said.

After the dental procedure, though, the dentist asked him about climate change, and Anālayo shared some things he could do. It was a light way, he said, to open the exchange of information that can lead to increasing global awareness.

Compassion: How can I help?

Another key component of a Buddhist response to climate change, according to Anālayo, is compassion – the wish for the absence of harm to others and also to oneself. “Compassion,” he writes in his book, “means wanting to do something to relieve the hardship of others.”

Even with the horrible scenarios out there, he said, there is “massive potential.” It can be a turning point for all of us, as Buddhists, to raise global awareness and find a way to live on this planet with nature instead of against it.

We need to find our own position, he counseled, and work with that as a continuous practice without denying and pushing it away. That might mean, for example, to conserve water or to avoid traveling by plane in the future. We all can make our own contributions.

In his conversation with Joseph Goldstein, he said, they agreed, “It is upon us to contribute to the probability that the potential can be realized. This can take the simple form of asking ourselves, ‘How can I help? How can I help?’ That is really the key.”

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The late fall colors near
Anālayo’s retreat.

Photo by Saddhavasini



Teachings from Anālayo

Be clear about why you meditate



by Saddhavasini
Editor, Vajra Bell

Two weeks after I and fellow Triratna order member Satyada walked and talked with Anālayo at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, I attended a retreat with him on “Neurobiology of Compassion and Compassion Practice” that was led by Diego Hangartner. Anālayo guided our meditation in the mornings and evenings and spent time with us taking our questions.

At the time, we were planning this issue of the *Vajra Bell* focused on climate change, a subject about which Anālayo cares deeply. While he talked of the climate crisis on our walk and at the retreat, he offered a number of other teachings that I took away from our conversations with him. Here are a few.

Mindfulness of breathing, not mindfulness of breath

Meditation is foundational to developing mindfulness. It gives us the tools to watch our minds as we respond to what is difficult. Anālayo came to meditation originally seeking to deal with his anger. He started with the mindfulness of breathing, focusing on and counting the breaths, but he found “the more I was meditating, the more angry I became. Anger is tunnel vision, and I was training myself in tunnel vision.” Instead, he came to realize that the practice was mindfulness of the process of breathing, in particular noting the breath as it goes in or comes out, rather than just focusing on the physical sensation caused by the breath.

Avoid a ‘hunting attitude’ with our practice

We often engage in concentration practices, such as the mindfulness of breathing, he said, with the idea that “I’m looking for something that pays me back for my effort.” We approach our practice with a “hunting attitude,” to achieve something that inevitably will fall away. When Anālayo practices the Brahma Viharas, for example, he experiences himself as dwelling in them, and the benefit is already there.

Be clear about why you meditate

Take a moment at the beginning of your meditation to reflect on your intention, your purpose for meditating, he said. For your own liberation? For the benefit of others? You need an altruistic intention. “I am meditating for the whole world,” he said. Having such an intention “makes a huge difference in our meditation.”

Practice and social action – the same

He also talked about the duality he sees in the West between practice and social action. He identifies himself as a Sri Lankan Buddhist, where he was ordained. There they see meditating and social work as inseparable. In the West, he said, they partition it. If I meditate, I don’t have time for social work; or, if I do social work, I don’t have time to meditate. The two are not separate, he said.

Being versus doing

There is no inherent value in not doing, he said. Sometimes you have to act. Being and doing are not separate boxes. They are on a spectrum, and you have the freedom to be anywhere on that spectrum. With being, you can be doing and with doing there can be being.

No one approach is ‘right’

No one practice is right in all situations. One needs mindfulness to see what one needs when practicing in different conditions. He shared that when he sits to meditate, he can ask himself, “What does Anālayo need today?”

In the same way, you can choose and practice different approaches and experiment. Ask yourself, “What do I want, what do I need now?” so that meditation becomes interesting. There are times when mindfulness of breathing is appropriate. But sometimes, he said, it’s too detailed, and “I just want to abide.”

‘We Are Part of Nature’

Grounding our activism in ethics and compassion

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of anxiety and even anger. These poisonous mental states make our engagement unsustainable and easily can lead to burnout. When overwhelmed by empathetic responses to world challenges, to images of police violence against people of color, to images of the sheet ice falling off glaciers in Antarctica as a result of global warming, to images of the suffering caused by the polarization in our political system, we are unable to act in a way that is consistent with our Buddhist principles.

Mindfulness is the way to overcome this danger, he said. We need to work with our minds, using mindfulness to see with clarity both our experience within, but also without, as is outlined in the Satipaṭṭhāna sutta. With mindfulness we can avoid extreme views, finding the middle way.

These concepts also apply to how we deal with issues of racism and diversity and the polarized nature of political discourse. Anālayo suggested we look to “open a space” in our dialogue, using mindfulness to take in the other person, manifesting the dharma as we offer an opportunity for open discussion. That is best done when we come to it with a quiet, equanimous mind, a mind where mindfulness is allowing us to be firmly grounded in our experience.

Of course, there was much more we touched upon in our conversation, but I close with this reflection. As Buddhists, we have a lot to offer in the way of transforming the world through the sphere of social engagement. To do that successfully, we first must look into our own minds and not confuse empathy with compassion. If we get too caught up in an empathetic response, we will burn out just as Icarus’ wings in Greek mythology melted when he flew too close to the sun. If we can balance

compassion with mindfulness, we can bring our Buddhist wisdom to bear, including the realization that we are part of nature, not above or outside it, as the contemplation of the elements in the Satipaṭṭhāna sutta shows us.

MINDFULLY FACING CLIMATE CHANGE

BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO



Barre Center for Buddhist Studies published Anālayo’s book, *Mindfully Facing Climate Change*.

Satyada was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order at Aryaloka in July 2012. He has been part of a team teaching the dharma at Aryaloka and in prisons for more than 12 years.