

Internal Desire and the External World: An Approach to Environmental Problems from a Buddhist Perspective

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CAN Buddhism make any contribution to the solution or amelioration of current environmental problems? This is not an easy question to answer. Certainly the “world” was not outside the interest of ancient Buddhists, and the state of the world is often linked to the state of our mind. “To the extent that the mind of a bodhisattva is pure, the Buddha-field also becomes pure” is a famous line found in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*.¹ According to this teaching, we are certainly responsible for the “world” we live in. However, the idea of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* seems to be a very idealistic one. The Sahā World will reveal its original purity to us if only we open our eyes. We need not change anything in the world itself. In other words, here the concept “world” is understood in a very subjective sense. The idealist philosophy of the Yogācāra tradition would be a further development of this type of thinking.²

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¹ Tibetan text in Pek. Bu 185b7–8, corresponding to T 14, 520b22–23 (No.474); T 14, 538c5 (No.475); T 14, 559c24–25 (No.476). Translations are found in Thurman 1992, p.18; and Nagao 1974, pp.20–21.

² The world appears in accordance with the state of one’s mind. See, for example, the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, section II. 14.

Though this idea certainly represents an important aspect of Buddhism, for the present purpose, it does not seem to be very helpful. If one is content with the purification of one's own mind and does not work for the purification of the world in the literal sense, one will not contribute much towards the solution of environmental problems.

We should note, however, that in the more realistic trends of Buddhism, too, like Sarvāstivāda and the mostly realistic *Yogācārabhūmi*, the state of the world is often linked to the karma of beings.³ We should further recall that according to the standard doctrine of Buddhism, karma is caused by mental defilements (*kleśas*), and for the purpose of this paper, the most important among the mental defilements is desire.⁴ As we shall see later, in some of the Buddhist texts, we can observe the idea that the grosser our desire becomes, the less favorable the world becomes.

This is a noteworthy idea. In the present world, it seems to be our excessive desire that is causing over-consumption and destroying our environment. If this is true, the situation is similar to what we find in Buddhist texts. In a way, ancient Buddhists even seem to have anticipated the problems we are facing today. In the first section of this paper, I would like to examine how the relation between desire and the external world was understood in classical Indian Buddhist texts.

If excessive desire is the fundamental cause of environmental problems, we have to control our desire somehow to improve the environmental situation. For this purpose, the key seems to be the ideal of *alpecchatā* or "modest desire" and the practice of a frugal and mindful life in Buddhist monasteries. In the second section, therefore, I would like to examine the ideal of frugal life in Indian Buddhism.

The tenets and practices of the past are, of course, very important, but for the present purpose, even more important is to examine how the ideal of frugal life is put into practice in living Buddhist traditions. Because of my personal background, in the remaining portions of this paper, I would like to focus on Japanese Zen, especially the Sōtō tradition.

³ The world is usually called *bhājanaloka*, or "receptacle world" in the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra literature.

⁴ See, e.g., the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Pradhan 2nd. ed., p.277. 1–2 [on Verse IV.1a]). This passage is also discussed in Waldron, n.d.

Thus, in section three, I shall discuss the significance of frugal and mindful life in the Sōtō tradition. In section four, I would like to show an example of a frugal and ecology-conscious lifestyle at Shōgoji 聖護寺, a famous Sōtō monastery in Kikuchi 菊池, Kyushu. I shall also briefly introduce the ecological movement advocated by the Sōtō school called “Green Plan.”

It is hoped that these discussions will lead us to some insight into the contribution Buddhism could make in the context of environmental problems.

1. *Textual Sources*

In both the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra texts, the formation and destruction of the world are considered to be due to the collective karma of sentient beings.⁵ Further, individual karma was also considered to lead a person to inhabit a corresponding favorable or unfavorable world.⁶

A more concrete image of the correlation between people’s behavior and the state of the external world can be illustrated with an interesting story found in the *Aggañña-sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. Since the story is rather long, here I shall summarize the directly relevant portion.⁷

⁵ According to the **Abhidharma-Mahāvibhāṣā* (T 27, 692c17–18 [No.1545]), when the common karma of sentient beings increases, the world is formed, and when the common karma is exhausted, the world is destroyed. In the *Manobhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi* also, the formation and destruction of the external world are linked to corresponding karma (Bhattacharya ed., p. 30. 21–31. 1). See also Schmithausen 2000, p.65, note 189.

⁶ See the *Savitarkā Savicārā Avitarkā Vicāramātrā Avitarkāvicārā Bhūmiḥ* of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (Bhattacharya, ed., p.184. 6–9).

⁷ *Dīgha-Nikāya*, PTS ed., vol.III, pp.84–93 (No.27). Parallel passages are found in the *Dīrghāgama*, T 1, 37c–38b (No.1[5]); *Madhyamāgama*, T 1, 674b–76a (No.26[154]); *Baiyi jinchiuang er poluomen yuanqi jing* 白衣金幢二婆羅門緣起經, T 1, 218b–20c (No.10); and *Mahāvastu* (Senart, ed., vol. I, pp. 338–50). For further parallels, see Akanuma [1931] 1967, table 1 (in the appendix) and Mochizuki [1932] 1977, appendix, pp.1–5. In addition, Okano 1998 reports that a Sammitiya text, *Mahāsaṃvartanikathā*, contains a developed version of the same story. I thank Professor Hiraoka Satoshi 平岡聡 for referring me to the works of Akanuma, Mochizuki, and Okano.

In the following summary, I mainly follow the line of the Pāli *Aggañña-sutta*, but sometimes I deviate from it and follow other versions. I believe this is justified, because the main point of this summary is to give a general idea of the story and not to give a textually accurate outline. In preparing this summary, I also referred to the abridged English translation of the *Aggañña-sutta* in Embree [1958] 1988, pp.129–31, and the full translation of the *Mahāvastu* in Jones [1949] 1973, I, pp.285–93. Cf. the discussion of the same passage in Schmithausen 2000, p.55, note 147; pp.65–66; and Waldron, n.d.

When the world was formed, beings descended from the realm of the Resplendent Deities and came to this world. They had mentally-created bodies, lived on joy, shone naturally, and flew in the air. At that time, the whole world was covered with water. There was no moon, no sun, no stars, and no days or nights, nor were there months, seasons, or years. Further, there was no gender distinction. Beings were just called “beings.”

A long time passed, and a tasty earth appeared on the waters. Then, a desirous being tasted this earth with a finger. That being liked it, and craving arose in that being. The other beings followed this example and began to make morsels of earth with their hands and eat them. However, as they ate the earth, their natural light disappeared. When their natural light disappeared, the moon and the sun appeared, and so did the stars, days and nights, months, seasons, and years. Further, the more they ate the tasty earth, the harder their bodies became. Among the beings, those who ate more became ugly, and those who ate less remained beautiful. The beautiful beings began to despise the ugly ones, and because of the arrogance of the beautiful ones, the tasty earth disappeared.

After the disappearance of the tasty earth, cakes, and then tasty creepers, sprung forth from the earth. As the beings ate them, their bodies became even coarser, and eventually both the cakes and creepers disappeared.

After that, fragrant rice, without bran or husks, grew without being cultivated. When people picked it for supper, it would grow and ripen by the next morning. When people picked it for breakfast, it would grow and ripen by the evening. As the beings ate the rice, however, their bodies became even harder. Finally, female characteristics appeared in women, as did male characteristics in men. They began to crave for the opposite sex and started to practice sexual intercourse. At first people strongly denounced this practice, and those who had indulged in sexual intercourse were expelled from the village for a month or two. Later, people started to build houses to hide this practice.

[Now that there were houses that could be used for storing rice,] a lazy person began to collect and store rice for two meals, instead of one[, in order to minimize his labor]. Other people followed his example and subsequently would collect rice sufficient for four, or

even eight, days' consumption. However, with the outset of the rice-storing practice, bran and husks began to cover up the grains of rice, and the rice did not grow again after being cut.

Thereupon, people decided to divide the rice fields with boundary marks. Nevertheless, there was one person who infringed upon other people's fields and took other people's share of rice. Since that person would not change his bad behavior even after being repeatedly reprimanded, they had to elect a king to enforce laws.

Needless to say, this is a mythological account of cosmogony and does not reflect historical or scientific fact. Nevertheless, this story contains significant messages.

In the beginning, people did not need to eat anything, nor did they possess anything, but they were perfectly happy. They had radiant bodies and enjoyed freedom. They were just content with what they had.

The external world was also extremely favorable to them. It generously provided various types of exquisite food without any labor on the part of the people. However, when people learned to eat tangible food (as opposed to the intangible aliment that had supported them before, namely, joy), desire gradually developed in them. The more they devoured food driven by enlarged desire, the less attractive their bodies became, and the less desirable the surrounding world grew. Finally, when people began to store surplus food, the earth stopped being generous to them.

They must have thought they would be happier if they gathered more food and stored it, but actually the more they stored, the less happy they became, and finally even moral degeneration ensued.⁸

In a way, this story seems to be foretelling our current problems. With the development of technology, life has become materially much richer and more convenient than before, at least in developed countries. However, this material affluence never completely satisfies us, and the more we have, the more we crave for. As a result, our desire swells up endlessly, and our enlarged desire leads to excessive consumption and results in the devastation of nature.

In the days when the *Aggañña-sutta* was composed, people did not have the instruments that our modern technology has created. Therefore, the peo-

⁸ One might also recall, at this juncture, the story of manna (Exodus 17.4–20), which was given every day, but which became wormy and rotten when people tried to keep it until the following morning.

ple in this story picked up the tasty earth with their hands, but now we have bulldozers, power shovels, and dynamite to sack the earth much more effectively and drastically.

If we keep squeezing resources from the earth at the current pace, our consumption may soon exceed the capacity of the earth, and the earth may become completely barren, like the earth that stopped reproducing rice in the *Aggañña-sutta*.

Seeing that, what can we do? In the following sections, let us try to find some suggestions in Buddhism concerning this problem.

2. *The Ideal of a Frugal Life in India*

If our excessive desire is one of the major causes of the environmental problems, the logical conclusion would be that we need to control our desire and lead a more frugal life.

In this context, particularly important is the traditional emphasis on *alpecchatā*, “modest desire,” and *samtuṣṭi*, “contentment,” in Buddhism.⁹ One should be content with the minimum necessities for daily life and should not seek to possess more than that. Inasmuch as we are alive, it would be impossible to live without having any desire at all.¹⁰ Excessive desire, however, does not lead us to happiness, much less to supramundane attainments.

This seems to be one of the important messages that Buddhism has kept teaching, and, needless to say, it was monastic communities that were fully devoted to the ideal of modest desire and a frugal life.

Buddhism is a teaching of the Middle Path, and so it does not impose excessive austerity on its followers, but wastefulness is strongly discouraged in every corner of life. The following story found in the *Commentary on the Dhammapada (Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā)* is very suggestive (in summary).¹¹

One day, Ānanda accepted a donation of five hundred monastic robes (*uttarāsāṅga*) from the pious Queen Sāmaṇī. Her husband, King Udena, felt it a little too much and asked Ānanda about the use of those robes. Ānanda said that he and his fellow monks

⁹ *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*, PTS ed., vol.IV, pp.228–33 (No.8.30); *Madhyamāgama*, T1, 540c–41c (No.26[74]); **Abhidharma-Mahāvibhāṣā*, T27, 214c–15b; *Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya*, 335.11–336.12, etc. Note also that these concepts appear frequently in Vinaya literature.

¹⁰ Cf. the **Abhidharma-Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 27, 215a6–17.

¹¹ PTS ed., vol.I, part II, pp.218–20. I also referred to the English translation in Burlingame [1921] 1979, pp.287–88.

would take the portion needed for themselves and give the rest to the monks who wore old robes. The old robes, then, would be given to those who wore even older robes. The older robes would be made into bedspreads. The old bedspreads would be made into carpets. The old carpets would be made into footmats. The old footmats would be torn apart, mixed with clay, and used to plaster walls with.

Very impressed with Ānanda's answers, the King donated another five hundred, and then even more, monastic robes.

This story suggests the way the monastic life was supposed to be. It is interesting to me that Buddhists were aware of the importance of recycling in such an early period.

3. *The Attitude to the Surroundings in Japanese Zen*

In what follows, I would like to examine how the ideal of a frugal life is reflected in the practice of living Buddhist traditions, especially Zen. My ultimate interest here lies in the actual practice in Zen monasteries, but before discussing this practice, first let us examine how the significance of practitioners' attitude toward their surroundings is understood in Zen.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, idealist tendencies represent a major aspect of Buddhism, and Zen might seem a representative of those tendencies. It is the mind that matters. When one's mind is truly settled, one need not worry about one's environment any more.¹²

When one observes the reality of Zen practice, however, one realizes that this is only one side of the coin. When I was practicing Zazen with monks at Bairinji 梅林寺, a major Rinzai monastery in Kurume 久留米, Kyushu, I heard a senior monk scolding a junior monk, who had put on his robe in an improper way, saying: "What a way to wear your robe! Your mental defilement is reflected in the way you wear your robe!" I think this is a noteworthy idea.

A truly settled mind would naturally be reflected in one's surroundings. For example, in the entrance hall of Zen temples, one often finds a sign, saying: "Watch your feet" (*kyakka shōko* 脚下照顧), which at once encourages one to be aware of where one stands in the philosophical sense and urges one

¹² E.g., "The filthy places and the marvelous lands you see are all illusions in your dream. In the Home of your True Nature, there are no such things." (Musō Kokushi 夢窓國師, *Muchū mondō* 夢中問答, Satō, ed., 1934, p.146).

to be mindful of the footwear one takes off. I think such a double meaning becomes possible because being mindful of everything that surrounds us is at the same time the practice of realizing the true nature of our mind.

Dōgen 道元 (1200–53), in his *Shōbōgenzō Zazengi* 正法眼藏坐禪儀, emphasizes the importance of keeping “the place one puts one’s own body” in a proper state when one practices Zazen.¹³ Further, in the *Tenzo kyōkun* 典坐教訓, he teaches the monks who work in the monastery kitchen to arrange all the cooking utensils in the right order,¹⁴ and to keep the food they get with utmost care, as if caring for their own eyes.¹⁵ He even says that a steamer for rice is one’s own head, and the water used to wash the rice is one’s own life.¹⁶ Clearly, all these instructions are not only for the sake of proper house-keeping but also carry deeper spiritual significance.

Certainly all these points are rather small, and they may not seem too significant for, or even relevant to, the preservation of the natural environment. However, these points will at least demonstrate clearly that Zen practitioners are not merely concerned about the internal and disregard what surrounds them. Rather, being mindful of their surroundings is an important part of religious practice.¹⁷ If, as individuals, we should be responsible for what directly surrounds us, then, together as human beings, should we not be mindful of,

¹³ T 82, 217a28–29 (No.2582); Cf. the English translation in Bielefeldt 1988, p.177.

¹⁴ T 82, 320b14–19 (English translation is found in Leighton and Okumura 1996, pp.35–36, but note that this translation contains some questionable points). See also the *Chiji shingi* 知事清規, T 82, 341b5–10 (No.2584; Leighton and Okumura 1996, pp.175–76).

¹⁵ T 82, 320a19–20 (Leighton and Okumura 1996, p.34). Note that “eyes,” in addition to its literal meaning, also implies the eyes that see the truth. See also the *Chiji shingi*, T 82, 340c16–21 (Leighton and Okumura 1996, p.173).

¹⁶ T 82, 320b29 (Leighton and Okumura 1996, p.36).

¹⁷ Schmithausen (1976, pp.253–54) considers that the *kāya-smṛtyupasthāna*, particularly the mindfulness of bodily postures and movements, is the oldest element among the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*. He further observes that this is an old practice also found in Jain literature. In the context of Jainism, its purpose is mainly to avoid carelessly harming tiny living beings. Dōgen’s emphasis on the mindfulness of everything that surrounds us somehow resonates with the spirit of this oldest form of *smṛtyupasthāna*.

It is true that at times Dōgen seems to be negative regarding the understanding that Zazen is a practice of *smṛti* (*Shōbōgenzō Zazengi*, T 82, 217b6–7, and *Fukanzazengi* 普勸坐禪儀, T 82, 1a18–19 [No.2580]; Bielefeldt 1988, p.177). Nevertheless, what he describes as “the Mahāyānist method of regulating breath” in the *Dōgen Oshō kōroku* 道元和尚廣錄, fascicle 5 (Ōkubo, ed., *Dōgen Zenji zenshū* 道元禪師全集, vol. II, p. 96) is no other than the traditional method of *ānāpānasamṛti*. In *Shuryō shingi* 衆寮清規 (T 82, 330a15 [No.2584]; Leighton and Okumura 1996, pp.110–11), too, he refers positively to the tenet of the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*, and in the *Hachidainingaku* 八大人覺 chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō* he strongly

and responsible for, the world in which we live? It might even be admissible to interpret “the place one puts one’s own body” in a larger context and take it as the world in which we live.¹⁸

In the case of water pollution, for example, it is said that a major cause is domestic sewage. If this is the case, unless every individual becomes more mindful of the small things that surround him or her, our environment is unlikely to improve. It is our small acts that together form our collective karma and improve or worsen the environment.

Dōgen says that when one eats, one should only accept the amount of food one can eat, and once one receives food in one’s bowls, one should eat it all without leaving anything.¹⁹ This may seem to be a matter of course, but considering the amount of food that goes into the trash in developed countries (or at least in Japan), we may need to return to this type of basic teaching once more.

A legend says that when Dōgen used a ladle of water to wash his face at Eiheiji 永平寺, which is deep in the mountains and has abundant water, he used only half of it and returned the remaining water to the stream for the sake of the people after him.²⁰ This attitude is in sharp contrast to that of us who are rapidly using up fossil fuel that has gradually accumulated over an enormous period of time, and who are likely to leave a devastated and barren planet for our offspring.

In the *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki* 正法眼藏隨聞記,²¹ Dōgen says that everybody is granted at birth a certain amount of food and clothing. Worrying about it does not result in our receiving it; we receive it even if we do not seek after it.²² This line resonates with the teaching of the *Aggañña-sutta*.²³ We all have an instinctive desire for possessions. We feel that we can be safer if we have

emphasizes the importance of *smṛti* (T 82, 308b18–25). I think it is clear that Dōgen was heavily influenced by the traditional method of the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*.

¹⁸ One might also consider that the expression, “the place one puts one’s own body,” sounds somewhat similar to the concept of “receptacle world.” See note 3 above.

¹⁹ *Fu shukuhan pō* 赴粥飯法, T 82, 327c14 (No.2584); Leighton and Okumura 1996, p.91.

²⁰ See Narasaki 1983, pp.135–38 (I thank Ven. Saitō Hōkan 齋藤芳寬 for the reference). There is a pair of big stone pillars erected at the main entrance to the precincts of Eiheiji commemorating this episode. Therefore, if not historical, this is certainly a well-known story.

²¹ This is a record of Dōgen’s informal teachings kept by his disciple Ejō 懷奘 (1198–1280).

²² *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*, Mizuno, ed., p. 111 (and 79). An English translation is found in Okumura 1988, p.77 (and 53).

²³ Cf. also the famous Sermon on the Mount: “Stop worrying, then, over questions like, ‘What are we to eat, or what are we to drink, or what are we to wear?’ . . . Your heavenly Father knows all that you need.” (Matthew, 6.31–32).

more. But both the *Aggañña-sutta* and Dōgen seem to be teaching that this is not the case. What we truly need will be given even if we do not seek for it, but trying to get more than necessary does not make our subjective or objective situation better.

In the *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*, Dōgen repeats that Buddhist practitioners must be poor,²⁴ and that property is the cause of misfortunes.²⁵ It is, then, only natural that in the Hachidai ningaku, the last chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, which he wrote just before his decease, he reiterated the importance of modest desire and contentment.²⁶

4. *The Practice of an Ecology-Conscious Lifestyle at Shōgoji*

Even now, in Zen monasteries in Japan, monks and nuns follow a traditional modest style of life and live harmoniously with nature. We can witness such a simple lifestyle in many monasteries, but in this paper I would like to introduce life at Shōgoji, a particularly ecology-conscious Sōtō monastery in Kikuchi.

Shōgoji is a renowned temple donated to Daichi Zenji 大智禪師 (1290–1366) by a local feudal lord in 1338. Daichi was a sixth generation Dharma offspring of Dōgen and is well-known for his anthology of verses, the *Daichi Zenji geju* 大智禪師偈頌. Daichi lived there for twenty years, but after his departure, the monastery gradually declined, and it ceased to exist around the fifteenth century.

It was Murakami Sodō 村上素道 (1875–1964) who restored this historical monastery.²⁷ Murakami was the abbot of Kōdaiji 皓台寺, a major Sōtō monastery in Nagasaki, but he relinquished that position in 1942 and moved to Kikuchi to restore Shōgoji. When he entered the site of Shōgoji, it was completely deserted, and there was hardly a path to reach the site. Worse still, it was during the Second World War, and everything was in short supply. He somehow managed to build the main hall and a few other buildings in 1944, but there were no tiles to cover the roof of the main hall. It was only in 1952 that the main hall was completely tiled. In those days, there was still no road to the monastery on which a car could drive, and so the local resi-

²⁴ *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*, Mizuno, ed., p.157; 169; 208 (Okumura 1988, p.116; 128; 162).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.157; 218 (Okumura 1988, p.116; 170).

²⁶ T 82, 308a15–b2.

²⁷ The following descriptions of the restoration process of Shōgoji are mainly based on Kokusai Zendōjō Hōgisan Shōgoji Gojikai 1996.

dents carried tiles manually from the nearby village.²⁸

Murakami passed away in 1964, and his dharma heir, Suzuki Soden 鈴木素田, became the abbot. Suzuki, however, also passed away rather prematurely in 1973 at the age of 58. Since then, Shōgoji has not had a resident abbot. The position of the abbot is held by the abbot of Zuiōji 瑞應寺, another major Sōtō monastery in Niihama 新居浜, Shikoku, and Shōgoji is now maintained by monks sent from Zuiōji. As I write this paper,²⁹ Narasaki Tsūgen 榑崎通元, the abbot of Zuiōji, is also the abbot of Shōgoji, and Takano Mugai 高野無涯 is responsible for the daily operation of the temple as *kanji* 監事, or “manager.” The former abbot, Narasaki Ikkō 榑崎一光, initiated international retreats (*kokusai ango* 国際安居)³⁰ at Shōgoji to accept practitioners from abroad. The 70-day international retreats have been held once a year since then.³¹

Even today, Shōgoji adheres to the simple lifestyle of Murakami Sodō.³² No electricity is supplied from the outside, and the inhabitants use kerosine lanterns at night. It is quite surprising that such a place still exists in present-day Japan.

Naturally there is no refrigerator, television, and so forth. Except for a few small items like flashlights, the only real electric appliances in the monastery are washing machines. In the days of Murakami Sodō, of course, all the washing was done by hand, but since the monastery is situated deep in the mountains where it gets very cold in winter, washing everything by hand was quite difficult. Therefore, washing machines have now been installed, and a small generator is used to run the washing machine. This generator also charges a battery that supplies electricity for very small electric bulbs that are used sporadically. Since the generator is fueled by gasoline, the monks do not feel completely comfortable about it, and so they are now considering the

²⁸ Kokusai Zendōjō Hōgisan Shōgoji Gojikai 1996, preface; p.184; 232; 234.

²⁹ As I mentioned at the beginning, this paper was originally written for a conference held in August, 1999. The descriptions of Shōgoji below are based on the facts as of 1999. Some details of these descriptions have changed since then, but, needless to say, the basic spirit of the monastery remains the same. In what follows, I leave the main text of this paper basically in the form I read at the conference and explain the later changes in footnote 33.

³⁰ Now it is called *tokubetsu ango* 特別安居, “special retreat.”

³¹ The traditional period of a retreat is 90 days, but it is a little shortened here, because it is technically difficult for participants from abroad to spend the full three months, which is the period of stay in Japan usually granted to international tourists, at Shōgoji.

³² The following descriptions are based on Takano 1998, my personal conversations with Takano and other monks at Shōgoji, and my own observations at Shōgoji.

possible introduction of a solar power generator.³³

Nor is gas supplied. Cooking is done on log and kerosine stoves. For the log stoves and the bath, a constructor who is one of the supporters of the temple periodically donates logs unusable for construction.

Until recently, Shōgoji's toilets were in the traditional Japanese style. At the international retreats, however, many practitioners from abroad complained about the smell and the many flies in the toilet area. The manager reported this problem to the then-abbot Narasaki Ikkō, and the abbot allowed the manager to convert some of the toilets into flush toilets. The abbot, however, added that the sewage from the toilets should not be let out of the monastery but should be disposed of within the monastery. This was not an easy task, but upon the recommendation of the abbot, the manager introduced a sewage disposal system using special microorganisms, the so-called "Effective Microorganisms," or "EM."³⁴

This system was relatively cheap to install and has proved to be very effective. In the system at Shōgoji, the overflow of sewage from the toilet tank is piped to a pool in the vegetable field, which is about 50 meters away. The "EM" is put into the tank and the pool periodically, which removes the unpleasant smell and gradually purifies the sewage. When the pool becomes full, the sewage is used as fertilizer for the field, by which time the sewage has become completely liquid and can be sprinkled through a faucet. When the toilets are cleaned up every day (an important part of Zen practice), no chemicals are used; instead the same "EM" is employed. This is particularly important because the sewage from the toilets is used as fertilizer for the vegetables consumed at the monastery.

The diet of the monastery is vegetarian, and brown rice is eaten. Some of the vegetables are from the monastery's own field, where vegetables are

³³ Now a solar power generation system has been installed, and many rooms of the monastery are now equipped with electric bulbs. Therefore, kerosine lanterns are used less often, but they are still sometimes used when there is not enough sunshine to charge the battery sufficiently. Another big change is that a log boiler has been installed in the kitchen, and so hot water is now supplied through the faucets in the kitchen (remember that this is a very cold place in winter). Otherwise, the descriptions above are still valid. As of June, 2001, they have two solar power-generation panels, but they are not enough to supply sufficient electricity for the washing machines, and so the gasoline power generator is still used to supplement the solar power generators.

³⁴ See Higa 1994, pp.20–21. The "EM" consists of lactic acid bacteria and other types of microorganisms.

grown without any chemical fertilizer or pesticide. In addition to the liquid fertilizer described just above, the garbage from the kitchen processed with powdered “EM”³⁵ is used in the field. The monks keep their garbage in a special container and add powdered “EM” from time to time. After a while, the garbage becomes good fertilizer.

Another big problem is the dirty water from the kitchen, bath, and washing machines. The Kikuchi area is famous for rice cultivation, and there are many rice fields in the area. If Shōgoji used neutral detergent, it would flow into the nearby river and eventually contaminate the rice that many people, including the monks themselves, eat. Therefore, they had to be particularly mindful of this issue, and they spent a long time looking for a safe soap. Finally, they found a biodegradable soap, which is produced in a traditional method of saponification that takes one week. The soap in the water is biodegraded in just one day. The final products are consumed by microorganisms and will be recycled naturally.

As for the trash from the monastery, what can be burned is used for boiling water for the bath. Plastics that cannot be burned in the monastery are collected by municipal garbage collectors and taken to an incinerator. The monks are trying, however, to reduce as much as possible the amount of plastic brought into the monastery.

I have to admit that Shōgoji is a special case, and the lifestyles in average temples are not so rigorous or frugal. However, I would like to point out here that the administrative headquarters of the Sōtō School, the Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 曹洞宗宗務庁, has been advocating the “Green Plan” since 1995. The “Green Plan” is a campaign for the improvement of environmental problems based on the principles of “modest desire” and “contentment.” For this purpose, the Shūmuchō is publishing many pamphlets,³⁶ and encouraging the school’s ordained and lay members to be more ecology-conscious. While it would be difficult for every member of the school to live in the rigorous lifestyle of specialized monasteries, we should note that the school is making an effort to cut waste and extravagance from the temple and from lay life.³⁷

³⁵ “EM *bokashi*” (EM ボカシ), which is a mixture of rice bran, husks, molasses, and dilution of the “EM.” It is then fermented and dried before used. See Higa 1994, p.115.

³⁶ See, for example, Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 1997; 1998.

³⁷ I thank Sōtōshū Shūmuchō for sending me many publications on this topic at my request. I regret that, due to a limitation of space, I cannot discuss this campaign in more detail.

Conclusion

In Buddhism, the mind has always been the focus of attention, and primary effort has been directed to the purification of one's own mind. This does not mean, however, that people have disregarded the external world.

I think that one's surroundings reflect the state of one's mind. If this is the case, it would not be unreasonable to say that the entire world reflects the minds of human beings as a group. Is the present devastated environment not the result of our minds being filled with excessive cravings?

I also believe that being mindful of one's surroundings is an important part of spiritual practice.³⁸ The ecology-conscious lifestyle at Shōgoji we have observed in this paper is an important example of such practice.

It is of course difficult for the average lay person to live in exactly the same way that monks and nuns live in monasteries. To my mind, however, the most important thing is that Buddhism still maintains not only the ideal but also the practice of a frugal monastic life. Thus, Buddhism gives us not only a philosophy but also concrete examples that we can, at least partly, emulate. If Buddhism can make any contribution to the solution of environmental problems, I think this is the most important contribution.

³⁸ See also note 17 above.

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YAMABE: INTERNAL DESIRE AND THE EXTERNAL WORLD

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