

# Our Connections with Nature

## 人類與自然的關係



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### What is the connection?

I would like to begin by sharing a personal experience. One summer a few years ago, my fellow nun found a baby bat in front of our monastery in the mountains of Hualien, Taiwan. We soon realized that this tiny, helpless creature, whom we named “Xiao Fu (petite blessing),” would not survive long on her own, so we immediately began to care for her.

As a new surrogate mother, I came to understand the monumental responsibilities a mother has to care for her child around the clock. I could not help but reflect on the power of the Dharma to help a being develop her Buddha-nature. Even though Xiao Fu lived only a month and a half, she was a lucky being. She got to hear the Dharma, attend the daily ceremonies, meditate, be vegetarian, and live with the Sangha. She elicited compassion and happiness in everyone who saw or held her, including the children, who completely adored her.

With her timid nature, Xiao Fu always wanted to hide in

### 緣份使然

開始之前，我想先分享一段自己的經歷。幾年前的一個夏天，我的一位同參在臺灣花蓮山上的道場前發現一只小蝙蝠。它看起來瘦小無助，實在沒有獨立生存的能力，於是我們決定要照顧它，並且為它取名「小福」。

作為一名新科褓姆，我開始體會到母親全天候照顧孩子的重大責任。我不由得地希望能藉由佛法的力量，開顯這個眾生的佛性。雖然「小福」的生命只延續了一個半月，但是她很幸運，因為她有機會聽聞佛法，並且跟著出家人一起生活，參加廟上每天的功課、打坐，而且吃素。每個見過或抱過她的人，慈悲喜悅之心都會油然而生。這些人包括小孩子，他們都十分喜愛小福。

小福天性膽小，總是躲在我們的長袍或者蜷在我們的掌中。當她感到安全和喜悅的時候，比如我們唱誦

our robes or snuggle upside down in our cupped hand. She vibrated the way a cat would purr when she felt safe and happy, such as during recitation and meditation. Although people might find her not very attractive at first sight, to us she was the most adorable little creature (less than 2 inches long).

We could hardly hear her high pitched squeaks, yet we learned to read her expression and actions to know what she liked to eat and whether she wanted to be fed or cuddled, or to hide away. She recognized the humans by smell and sound, and learned what our clucking noises or words meant. When she dreamed, her ears and limbs twitched.

One day, we tried to get her to fly, and what she was able to do amazed us. She naturally spread her wings and soared towards the high mountains, exploring her first moment of freedom in the open sky. But the way Xiao Fu decided to experience freedom had our nun completely worried when we heard the nun shouted in panic, “Xiao Fu, Xiao Fu, come back!”

As bats use echolocation to navigate, Xiao Fu managed to identify the direction of the nun’s voice and veered in a wide circle back towards us, crash landing in the bushes and scrambling up my arm to her usual hiding place. She was just as excited and terrified as we all were about her first flying adventure.

After spending six weeks in our monasteries, Xiao Fu suddenly passed away. The nuns recited the Buddha’s name and spoke Dharma for her, praying for her to be liberated from a bat’s body and reborn into her next life as a Buddhist disciple. That night, I reflected on the fragility of life, the sense of death as liberation from the body, and the fluidity of the Buddha-nature.

This unique experience opened my heart to identify with a species not well understood by humans. I marveled at how similar she is to us in her physical needs, emotional responses, and intelligence. All of us had grown spiritually through this affinity. It further strengthened my conviction that all beings share the same Buddha-nature. I realized that through forming caring relationships with beings very different from ourselves, we are given the opportunity to broaden and deepen our sense of the Buddha-nature, and to generate compassion for other species and the environment.

In real life, however, the rapid growth of the human population and the increase in its consumption of natural resources threaten to destroy the planet’s ecosystems and send increasing numbers of species into extinction. With the loss of habitat and fewer species surviving, the opportunity to experience and interact with wildlife becomes extremely rare - an ideal which is difficult to realize.

或打坐的時候，她的身體會發出振動，就像小貓高興時發出的低鳴。雖然有些人覺得她長得不怎麼起眼，但在我們的眼裡，她是最可愛的小生命（身長不到2英寸）。

我們幾乎沒聽過她高音尖叫，但可以從她的表情和動作中知道她喜歡吃什麼，需要的是食物還是撫摸，或著只是想躲起來。她藉由氣味和聲音辨別人類，也學會一些人類音聲和詞彙所代表的意義。進入夢鄉後，她的耳朵和四肢會自然顫動。

有一天，我們想讓她學飛，而她的表現也令我們嘆為觀止。只見她自然地張開翅膀，一下子就往對面的高山飛去，在遼闊的天空探索生命中第一次的自由。然而，她體驗自由的這個決定，卻令我們擔憂萬分，只聽見一位法師焦急地喊著：「小福，小福，回來！」

蝙蝠是利用回聲定位，因此識別到聲音的方向後，只見小福轉一大圈，朝我們飛來。在灌木叢中迫降後，她爬上我的胳膊，躲到平日習慣的藏身之地。對自己第一次的飛行歷險，她和我們一樣地興奮和驚慌。

在道場生活六個禮拜後，小福突然往生了。幾個出家人為她念佛與開示，迴向她脫離蝙蝠的色身之後，能投胎成為一位佛教徒。那一晚，我觀想著生命的脆弱。某種程度上，死亡讓生命從肉身獲得解脫，也展現了佛性的隨緣應物。

這個獨特的經歷，讓我對一個陌生的生命敞開心扉並獲得共鳴。我很驚嘆小福的生理需要、情感回應和理解能力，和人類是如此地相似。這個善緣，激發了與她相遇的每個心靈，令我更加深信一切眾生皆有佛性。我也了解到與動物建立友愛的關係，能增加對佛性認識的廣度與深度，同時長養對不同物種和環境的慈悲心。

然而實際生活中，人口快速膨脹以及自然資源耗用的增加，已經威脅到地球生態系統的破壞與更多物種的滅絕。隨著野生棲息地和生物種類的減少，人類與動物交流互動的機會將更為渺茫，變成一個難以實現的理想。

## The consequences of a century of uncontrolled human activity

The past hundred years have been dubbed the “Anthropocene Era” due to the planetary scale of human impact, which has transformed the earth and imperiled all species. Such impact began with physical transformations, which have taken their toll in the psychological and spiritual realms.

## The transformation of the physical world

The planet is now under pressures more tremendous than the natural forces that caused the sixth great mass extinction 11,700 years ago. Nearly half of the earth’s land surface has been transformed wholesale for human needs, including forty percent for agricultural activities. There is a drastic reduction in wildlife habitat. According to the National Wildlife Federation, “Habitat loss—due to destruction, fragmentation or degradation of habitat—is the primary threat to the survival of wildlife in the United States.”<sup>1</sup> The following are just a few of the alarming trends:

- World wildlife declined 52% in the past 40 years; meanwhile, meat/dairy production quadrupled
- 150-200 plant and animal species become extinct every 24 hours
- Ninety percent of large fish species are extinct; nearly all oceanic fish will be extinct by 2048
- Forty percent of the world will experience shortage of freshwater by 2030
- All topsoil will be gone in 60 years

Scientists say that five of the nine tipping points that will send the planet’s life systems into irreversible decline have already been passed.<sup>2</sup> In the past century, human arrogance and shortsightedness have become all too clear. Half a century ago, marine biologist Rachel Carson alerted the world to the lethal stupidity of using DDT as a pesticide: “How could intelligent beings seek to control a few unwanted species by a method that contaminated the entire environment and brought the threat of disease and death even to their own kind?”<sup>3</sup>

## Our psychological disconnect

Nowadays most children (in industrialized countries) are raised in urban settings and spend too much time in the virtual world, to the point that their knowledge of nature is severely stunted. Their contact with “wildlife” is often limited to gaming animation and videos. They tend to be

## 人類百年行為無控的後果

基於人類活動對地球以及所有物種造成的巨大影響，有人將過去的一百年戲稱為「人類世」。這樣的衝擊首先反應在物質世界的改變，精神世界和信仰世界也隨之受到影響。

## 物質世界的變化

地球目前承受的壓力，已超過一萬一千七百年前造成六次物種大滅絕的自然力。地球上接近半數的陸地被人類開發使用，其中40%為農業活動，野生動物棲息地大量減少。根據美國國家野生動物協會的研究：「棲息地的損失——由於毀壞、斷裂或退化——是美國野生動物生存的首要威脅。」以下所列，只是眾多令人擔憂趨勢中的幾個：

- 世界野生動物數量，在過去40年減少了52%；與此同時，肉類/奶製品的數量增加以前的四倍。
- 每24小時，150-200種植物和動物滅絕。
- 90%的大型魚類已滅絕，到2048年幾乎所有海洋魚類都會滅絕。
- 到2030年，世界上40%的地方將缺乏淡水。
- 60年後，所有的地球表層土將會消失。

科學家指出，九個將導致地球生命系統不可逆衰退的臨界點，五個已經越過。一個世紀以來，人類越來越明顯地展露自己的自大與短視。半個世紀前，海洋生物學家蕾切爾·卡爾遜（Rachel Carson）就向全世界發出警訊，提到將DDT作為殺蟲劑是致命的愚蠢行為：「聰明的人類怎麼可能為了遏制一些他們不想要的物種，就去選擇一個會污染整個環境，甚至會給自己帶來疾病和死亡的方法？」

## 內心情感的阻斷

如今，工業國家中的大多數兒童都在城市中長大，加上大量的時間沉浸在虛擬世界中，以至於對大自然的認識極度貧乏。他們與「野生動物」的接觸，多數只侷限於動畫玩具和影片。他們害怕接觸泥土和昆蟲，對於像蝙蝠這樣不熟悉的動物，更是欠缺好奇心與同理心。天主教生態學家托馬斯·貝裡（Thomas Berry）宣告人類開始進入自閉的狀態，因為我們逐漸與生物圈中的其他生物疏遠，「我們不再傾聽地球、地球上的風景、大氣和所有的生物、山脈、峽谷、雨水、風和所有花草植物的聲音。」



scared of dirt and bugs, and feel little curiosity or sympathy for unfamiliar beings such as bats. Catholic ecotheologian Thomas Berry declares that humans have become autistic, for we have alienated ourselves from the rest of the biosphere. “We no longer listen to what the Earth, its landscape, its atmospheric phenomena and all its living forms, its mountains and valleys, the rain, the wind, and all the flora and fauna of the planet are telling us.”<sup>4</sup>

Berry correlates the internal disconnect to external environmental abuse: “Physical degradation of the natural world is also the degradation of the interior world of the human.”<sup>5</sup> Human beings who have never experienced a sense of identity with other species, will not hesitate to destroy wildlife habitat, which they see only in terms of usefulness or profitability to themselves. They can blithely make decisions to pollute rivers, clear-cut trees, remove mountaintops, frack the land, and blacken the air with smog, without a second thought.

### Our spiritual need for nature

At the same time, thinkers have emphasized our deep spiritual need for nature. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) must have foreseen the spiritual loss we would suffer in a landscape of urban sprawl, highways, industrial farms, and their associated waste, when he declared, “In Wildness is the preservation of the World.”<sup>6</sup> In the face of environmental disaster, Rachel Carson celebrates the healing strength provided by nature: “Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.”<sup>7</sup> Berry urges humankind to rediscover the spiritual presence of the natural world, which is known by many names and essential to human existence.

There is need for awareness that the mountains and rivers and all living things, the sky and its sun and moon and clouds all constitute a healing, sustaining sacred presence for humans which they need as much for their psychic integrity as for their physical nourishment. This presence whether experienced as Allah, as Atman, as Sunyata, or as the Buddha-nature or as Bodhisattva; whether as Tao or as the One or as the Divine Feminine, is the atmosphere in which humans breathe deepest and without which they eventually suffocate.<sup>8</sup>

Berry's reference to the sustaining presence of nature resonates to some extent with the Buddhist view of nature. Although Buddhism does not regard nature as either more or less sacred than the human, serious practitioners have become awakened in nature since the Buddha's time, affirming the spiritual benefits of meditating and living in the wilderness. The Buddha himself strove for “the supreme state of sublime bliss” in the wilderness.

From the Thera-gatha or *Verses of the Elders*, we see that the Buddha's

貝裡認為這種內心情感的阻斷，與外在環境的破壞是相互關聯的：「自然界的物質退化，正是人類內心世界的退化。」從來沒有和不同生物有過共鳴的人，才會毫不猶豫地摧毀野生棲息地，因為在他們的眼裡只有經濟用途和實用價值，所以恣意地污染河流、砍伐樹木、推平山頂、壓裂土地、排放廢氣，而不顧任何後果。

### 精神世界需要大自然

思想家也強調人類精神世界對大自然的強烈需求。亨利大衛·梭羅（Henry David Thoreau 1817-1862）想必是預見城市擴張、高速公路、工業化農業以及相關的廢料，將導致人類精神世界的迷失，因此才說：「維護野生環境，才能保護這個世界。」面對環境災難，蕾切爾·卡爾迅（Rachel Carson）熱情贊頌大自然的療癒力：「懂得體會大地之美的人，可以儲備伴隨一生的能量。自然界的周而復始，蘊藏某種無窮的治愈力——夜晚後黎明一定會到來，冬天後春天一定會到來。」貝裡敦促人類重新找回大自然的神性，這對人類生存至關重要，人類對其也有許多不同的稱呼。

山脈、河流、生靈萬物、天空、太陽、月亮、雲彩，都具有療癒和永續的神性，這是人類色身滋養及心靈淨化所不可或缺的。這神性，無論被喚作真主阿拉、真我、空性、佛性、菩薩、道、造物主、或是聖女，都是人類賴以呼吸的空氣。沒有祂，人類終將窒息。

貝裡提到的神性，某種程度上和佛教對自然的看法不謀而合。雖然佛教並不認為自然比人類多一點或少一點神聖，但是從佛陀時代開始就有修行者在大自然中悟道，這肯定了在山林水邊打坐與生活對精神世界的益處，佛陀本人也是在荒野中尋求「至高境界的妙樂」。

根據《長老偈》中的描述，佛陀的弟子多數也在森林坐禪。舍利弗尊者這樣贊頌森林：「森林是如此美好，世人卻不這樣認

disciples typically practiced meditation in the wilds. Śāriputta sings the praises of the forest: “Forests are delightful, where (ordinary) people find no delight. Those rid of desire will delight there; they are not seekers after sensual pleasures.” Kaludayin meditates on a mountain peak and vows, “While the wind blows cool and sweet smelling, I shall split ignorance asunder, as I sit on this mountain top.”<sup>9</sup> Buddhaghosa (5<sup>th</sup> cent.), in *The Path of Purification*, explains the benefit of practicing in the forest: “A forest-dwelling bhikkhu who has given attention to the perception of forest can obtain hitherto unobtained concentration, or preserve that already obtained.”<sup>10</sup>

Venerable Master Xuyun, the greatest contemporary monk in China, spent years living and wandering in the mountains. A typical comment from his autobiography shows how the wilderness sharpens his awareness. “Since entering Sichuan that year, I had walked alone with only a bowl and the proper garments of a monk, thus being entirely free from all hindrances. As I wound my way across mountains and rivers, the scenery helped to clarify my mind.”<sup>11</sup>

The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta Thera, an accomplished Theravadin monk of the Thai Forest Tradition, also testifies to the spiritual efficacy of the wilds. “The more desolate and distant the place is from human habitation, with wild beasts roaming freely about, the more prepared is the mind to soar up from the abyss of defilements, being at all times like a bird about to fly.”<sup>12</sup> Even today, the Thai Forest Tradition retains this mode of living, although sadly, the majority of Thailand’s rainforests were clear-cut in the late twentieth century.

In fact, nearly all accomplished Buddhist practitioners spent periods of seclusion in the wilderness. The hermits and mystics of other traditions also share this reliance on the uncivilized wilds to hone their awareness. If only 10% of the earth’s land area is remote from a large city<sup>13</sup>, what does this mean for the efficacy of spiritual practice?

The next part will explore some Buddhist perspectives on our relationship with nature and the impact of the environmental crisis.

待續

To be continued

為。只有擺脫欲望的人才能感受森林中的愉悅，因為他們已不再追求感官的享受。」迦留陀夷尊者在山頂打坐並且發願：「坐在山頂，伴隨著風吹來的清涼和香甜，我要將無知粉碎。」覺音大師（五世紀）在《清淨道論》中闡述在森林中修行的益處：「一個在森林裡禪修的比丘，如果能洞悉森林的意義，就可以獲得未有的定力，或是保任已有的定力。」

中國近代禪宗泰斗虛雲老和尚，一生中很多時間在山間居住和雲游。他的自傳中有一段精闢的描述，透露了山居生活如何激發他的悟性：「那年入川後，予獨自一人步行，身邊只帶了一個食鉢和僧衣，無礙自在。予行走於山脈與河流中，沿途的風景令予心清。」

南傳佛教尊者阿迦曼，泰國森林傳統中的一位得道高僧，也證明山野生活對精神修煉的幫助：「越是在荒無人煙、遠離人群的地方，那裡野獸自由漫步，我們就越有機會躍出染污的深淵，像鳥兒隨時振翅欲飛。」即至今日，泰國森林傳統的出家人仍然保持這樣的生活方式。唯一令人難過的是，境內大多數的雨林都在20世紀晚期殆盡。

事實上，幾乎每一位有成就的佛教修行者，都會有一段在山野隱居的時期。其他傳統中的隱士和神秘主義者，也同樣藉助原始的自然生活來激發心靈的悟性。試想，如果地球上只剩10%的土地遠離塵囂，這對修行的成功意味著什麼呢？

下一個部分，將從佛教觀點討論人類與自然關係，以及當前環境危機的衝擊。

Notes:

1. <https://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Threats-to-Wildlife/Habitat-Loss.aspx>
2. Climate Vegan, Richard Oppenlander’s Pre-Cowspiracy Screening Presentation to the EU Parliament (Part 2 of 7), accessed March 17, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2JytUitqB0>.
3. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962.
4. “ECOBUDDHISM : Thomas Berry,” accessed March 13, 2016, [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/psyche\\_and\\_spirit/thomas\\_berry/](http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/psyche_and_spirit/thomas_berry/).
5. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (Crown/Archetype, 2011), 110.
6. Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004).
7. Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (Harper & Row, 1965), 88–89.
8. Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts* (Counterpoint, 2010), 135.
9. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 154–55.
10. Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* (Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 68 (Ch II, 54).
11. Xuyun, *Empty Cloud: The Autobiography of the Chinese Zen Master, Hsu Yun* (Empty Cloud Press, 1974), 18.
12. Boowa Nanasampanno, Phra Maha, *The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta Thera, Meditation Master*, 41.
13. “Travel Time to Major Cities: A Global Map of Accessibility - Transport Futures Institute,” Transport Futures Institute, December 25, 2008, <http://www.transport-futures.com/travel-time-to-major-cities-a-global-map-of-accessibility/>.