



[Buddhist Encounters: Finding a Home in the Human Condition]

Human Condition: Earthly and Cosmic

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This time is one in which the questions about our human condition are expanding to new areas of concern. It is hard to identify any era in human history where shifts in thinking and understanding have happened so rapidly and the consequences have been so significant. We are challenged by the changes of everyday life on this earth and also are being asked to deal with new discoveries about the distant past of our universe, the home and context for the human condition. That is why I have chosen to speak about both the events taking place around us on earth as well as looking at the impact of revolutionary ideas about the universe.

At this moment in history, our assumptions about how to define the human condition are being considered by the highest judicial courts and in recent years have been dominant in debate between political entities. At the forefront of one of the major discourses is the question of when the cells in a woman's body become a person with full rights of protection. Our legal system is attempting to measure this process of generating a human body and one way that they do this is trying to determine when human life can be said to start, based on days and weeks from the time of the penetration of the egg by a sperm. Who is equipped to make such decisions: Is it a medical one? A legal one? A moral one? A matter of faith and belief? The woman whose body holds the cells? Buddhists have struggled with this issue. And in the fullness of centuries of thought, that they have generated in groups scattered over a wide expanse of the earth's surface, it is not surprising to find a multitude of opinions. Some Buddhists hold that human existence starts

at the very instance of conception; some have said that it is when the fetus first takes a breath; and others have identified stages of consciousness as the markers to be used.

For most of us, the interior of the human body is a black box. We have never seen the internal organs exposed to view. Doctors in medieval Europe had to break the law to use a corpse for the study of human life. I suspect that in India, there was no such mystery since bodies were taken to open fields and exposed to encourage birds and animals to eat the flesh. Anyone going to these charnel fields could view organs, even unborn fetuses at various stages of development. Meditating monks would go to the fields with the dead bodies and focus on them as a way of learning about the human condition. Buddhist scriptures contain a listing of all the human organs as one way to discuss the body and how it functions. Thus, Buddhists were fully aware that the body is composed of many units that function together for life. However, rebirth for Buddhist was not just the development of the body with all its organs. As Buddhist texts over time and place attempted to describe birth and death and the process by which they occur, the most important element in a new life was the appearance of consciousness. From this perspective, they taught that conception is when consciousness enters a living body and death is when consciousness separates from the body. Each conception is a new body and the consciousness which animates it is ever renewed moment by moment. A cardinal doctrine was the clear statement that nothing remains the same and so it is with consciousness, that it continues to transit from one moment to the next until it takes on a body when the sperm enters the egg. If there is no consciousness, then conception is not completed and the tissue ceases to develop and is cast off. In rebirth or reincarnation, consciousness is the essential ingredient needed for birth. The movement of consciousness was considered to take place in an endless round of birth and death. In the story of the night of his enlightenment, Sakyamuni Buddha has a vision of millions of people being born and dying in an endless cycle. He vows to step out of the repetitive pattern. One of the most often seen images of the Buddha is the depiction of him lying on his side with his eyes closed. Many times, the image is wrongly identified as the “Sleeping Buddha.” It is something much more significant. It is the moment when he reached final Nirvana and all consciousness that was present in his last human body ceased

and he was not reborn. It is the highest development of the human condition, when at death all functions of body and mind are completely ended. It does not happen automatically, it requires the highest degree of spiritual development to bring the process of the human condition to an end. No wonder Buddhist artisans were commissioned time and again to make an image of this great moment which marked the end of birth and death, the end of suffering, the end of perception. As is so often the case, not all Buddhists held to this opinion. Some maintain that even an enlightened one, who has reached a point of development when continued birth and death can be brought to an end, chooses, out of compassion, to continue to be reborn in order to help sentient beings who are still mired in the circle of birth and death. For many, these Bodhisattvas are considered to be amongst us. By the force of spiritual development their consciousness stream continues and can take any form of birth that will provide a body for the Bodhisattva to accomplish compassionate acts, not just as humans but even as animals or spirits, as well as gods in the heavens. The human condition is seen as an object of compassion and so, the Bodhisattva uses the power of spiritual development to continue the rounds of rebirth in order to give comfort and assistance to all sentient beings.

I suspect that the most difficult Buddhist doctrine to understand and accept within the human condition is the idea that there is no permanent self, no unchanging entity that can be called a soul. But how can this be so when “I” wake up every morning and look in the mirror and see “myself”? How can it be that I can reach old age and still feel that I am the same “person” as I was in my youth? My body may age dramatically but my sense of self remains intact. This idea that I am still the same person as I was decades ago, is an example of how we deny the Buddhist teaching about the self. Teachers over the centuries tried to find ways to impart this most important message to believers. In India, it was made difficult by the fact that the Brahmanic tradition taught that there is an “Atman,” a self that has split from Brahma. Salvation is to find a way to reunite that self with Brahma, the cosmic wholeness. Buddhism took a different route. For example, we find numerous descriptions of a magician who can make a body appear and then disappear, can even cut off the head of this illusory image or cut it into pieces. The question is, “When the magician cuts off the head, is it murder or not?” The answer is “not”. Just as we have depiction in a movie or a video

game of murder and killing, it is understood that this is merely illusory and there is no death, no murders. What is this illusory being in human experience that makes this story of such importance? We can approach this through the famous verse in the *Heart Sutra*. “Form is Emptiness and Emptiness is Form.” The meaning of “Form” is often taken to be the material world of objects. I believe it would be much more understandable if we say “perceived form,” the mental state that we have when a perceived form is experienced. I had camera views of all those who were listening to this lecture on my computer screen. It was only a moment of perception when my eye received a reflection of light and transmitted it down the optic nerve to my brain which had a chemical and electrical event that I experienced, “I see you.” The human condition is such that we can never have direct experience of anything. All experience comes to us indirectly and while I was convinced that I was seeing my audience. Buddhist texts remind us that when “I see you,” my perception is not “you” but an internal process in my brain. Therefore, I, like the magician, had conjured up a perception of “you.” When I turned off my computer that night and closed the screen with those images, did I destroy or kill my audience? We immediately shout “No.” Our computer screens are similar to the mental process of perception, the pixels of color are arranged in such a way that they resemble all of us and our environment and it appears very real, but the image is an illusion.

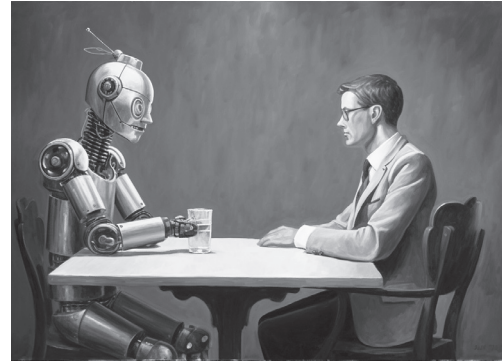
When I feel that I have a permanent self that has survived from childhood unchanged, even as the body is constantly undergoing mutation, it is an illusion. We change during our lifetime. My ten or twenty year old self would not recognize me or understand my experiences or my thoughts as a 90-year-old man. That is why the story of the magician is of importance. Our minds give us an illusion that seems so real that we are led to believe in an unchanging self. This leads us to ask the questions: What is it that makes us humans? When do we become fully human? Up to the present, we have prided ourselves on being the most highly developed animal, our brain the most impressive tool for thought. One writer has measured the superiority of the human brain in terms of the bits per second that are generated by it. For centuries, there was nothing comparable. In the 1920s the brain outperformed all machines by trillions of bits, in the 1940s this was lowered to billions, in the 1980s it had shrunk to thousands.

Recently, for the first time, the fastest computer in the world in China reports that it generates more bits per second than the brain. We had already conceded the world championship of Chess and Go to the computer, computation speed and complexity is also dominated by the digital machines. A comforting thought was that a computer would never write a poem, a novel, or an essay. Then the “Bot” known as ChatGPT was introduced. A “Bot” is at one level a digital entity that can do machine learning. That is, it can learn from exposure to data, even when it has no human programming that specifically trains it to do so. We are still trying to comprehend what these “bots” mean to our human condition. Noam Chomsky, a famed thinker, could only say that he thought it was a platform for cheating. I think it is far more than that. People have used it to pass the bar exam tests, the medical boards, and Graduate Record Exams. The computer now writes poems when we give it a theme. It can go beyond producing an image map for us and write the code needed by the computer to make a map to our specifications. There have been demands that such Bots be outlawed and those using them should be punished for “cheating.” There were those who did not think such Bots are just a “platform for cheating.” Microsoft announced it would put billions into the development of new and more powerful ones. When Google’s first test of their entry into the race, it resulted in an error, and their stock lost millions on the next trading day. There is no way to out-law something that has gone viral to such a degree and possesses such promise. Our human condition has just shifted with a rapidity that is unprecedented. The digital world is in ascendency, and there are serious implications for us: Who will own and control such powerful tools? Will they be used to feed bias into our searches? Who will profit from the income and will it accumulate wealth for a few? For the purposes of this lecture, what can Buddhist teachings say about such a situation?

In the past centuries, new technologies were brought into the Buddhist sphere. For example, writing was a very major change agent for the religion. The ancient use of oral recitation from memory had established the methods used by monastics which required that the content be maintained by having groups of chanters sitting together so that errors would be noticed and corrected. But when written texts could be produced by anyone and distributed, the text became its own authority. It contained the information in images drawn or written on the

page. Printing was another technological jolt to the Buddhist system. Large monasteries were copy centers, with trained scribes making duplicate texts manually. The scribes were put in a very different position when printing blocks could be used to make tens of thousands of multiple copies at a much faster rate than hand copying. In most recent times, the technology of the silicon chip has allowed memory to be put into a digital form. No longer requiring thousands of scrolls to record the canons, the textual tradition of Buddhists can be in the hands of ordinary individuals and usable on handheld devices. Buddhism survived all these technological advances and even thrived under them. Now the world of Bots is unlike anything we have ever seen and once again the old methods are being upended. I can ask the Bot to generate an essay giving me the major teachings of Buddhism and it does. It is not innovative in its description, but there is every reason to assume that it will be in the future. As the texts teach us, nothing remains permanent, everything undergoes change at every moment. Our digital world has just proven the truth and reality of constant change. Not only Buddhism but all of us need to reassess the nature of the Human Condition in this environment where Artificial Intelligence has, in some areas, surpassed our human abilities.

As if it is not enough of a challenge to see the changes brought to our human condition by digital entities, technology is also giving us a new view of the universe. The Human Condition is now viewed by telescopes that capture light from distant galaxies and from these data we are aware of how immense our universe is. We speak of “light years” meaning how far light can travel in 365 days, which is about 6 trillion miles. At our current state of technology for space travel, it would take 37,200 years to go the distance of one light year. If we could send humans toward the nearest star to our sun, they would have to travel nearly five light years over a time span of 186,000 years. There would be so many generations before arrival that no one aboard would have any connection to the



Modern digital technology is advancing by leaps and bounds, and machines People can already replace many human jobs.

earth as it existed when the journey started. Our feeling of wanting to know if we are alone in the universe or if we share it with other beings is understandable. The Buddhists gave much thought to the universe and we have one way of seeing the direction of their belief. In the Prajnaparamita Sutras, the earliest fully developed sutra says the audience for the teaching of the Buddha starts with 1,250 monks. By the time that the basic sutra of that family of texts has been expanded to 100,000 lines, the audience is found throughout the universe and even extends into multi-verses that have billions of beings listening to the teaching. It is one of the remarkable accounts in the Mahayana texts that described the limitless nature of multiverses. Observing the night sky does not reveal such magnitude, so the idea of universes existing within larger universes had to be based on mental conceptions. That humans could have such visions is probably possible because of certain forms of deep meditation. We have the lists of the named trance states into which practitioners entered, states called Samadhis. The names of these altered states indicate that meditators could have visions of the gods in the heavens or even more precisely, could hear the gods speaking and understand them. We are inhabitants of the universe and our human condition is part of the vastness of space and time. It is one of the ways in which Buddhism helped to define our place in the nature of things. When we send out explorations in rocket ships, tiny specs compared to the size of the universe, we are seeking to understand our human condition. There is a hope that we will find that life forms exist apart from earth, even within the solar system. Exoplanets that circle suns, some with water covering much of the surfaces are being sought to help us better understand our earth and the arising of organic life, that mysterious and essential part of ourselves.

Our present age with Artificial Intelligence and expanding views about the size and nature of the universe is creating a view of the human condition that is in many ways disturbing. History is filled with stories of stress that came from changes upsetting the status quo of commonly held beliefs. We are living in a time when the various forms of Buddhism may have an opportunity to help us accept the reality of changes and let go of attachments to the past. A past that is often viewed as a golden age and one which we should fight at all costs to maintain. We may wish to reestablish life as it was before COVID killed millions

and proved how susceptible we are to microbes, before digital transformations of communication, when books and libraries were the major source of information, a time when privacy of our personal, medical, and financial life was still intact, when only a human could write a poem, when there was apparent control of information. What Buddhists have to teach us is: Change is constant and no amount of effort will ever reestablish the same environment as in the past. When we see all around us rapid and never before experienced change, it is crucial to accept that reality and put all our efforts into responding to the new world and making it a more positive force in our Human Condition.

It is true that changes in our world have been significant and frightening. One scholar has said that if you could transport someone from the year 1750 to the 21st century, it is possible that experiencing our lifestyle would be fatal for them. Imagine someone who has been traveling by foot and horse, finding themselves in an automobile going 60 miles an hour on a crowded freeway. Even more frightening would be getting into an airplane and suddenly being at 30,000 feet moving at speeds over 500 mph. It is not too far-fetched to think that such experiences might cause heart attacks from fear. However, I think of my grandmother who was born in the 1880s and lived until the middle of the 20th century. She experienced going from horse drawn buggies to jet planes and was able to adjust. We humans are adaptable and we have populated the planet from deserts to the frozen arctic. The same author makes the point that for the individual in 1750 to go back in time to an era with similar revolutionary changes, it might not be until 12,000 BCE that life would be unrecognizable to us. That is the First Agricultural Revolution. In my own experience, I realize that just the difference from 2019 to 2023 meant shifts of enormous import. The COVID Pandemic, the space telescope data about the universe, Artificial Intelligence able to write essays and poems that mimic human productions have changed the potential future culture and understanding of our Human Condition in ways we could hardly imagine prior to these changes. Even though changes in the world make the thoughts expressed in these lectures problematic, there are aspects of our Human Condition that remain with us for our whole life.

When I had my first introduction to Buddhism nearly 70 years ago, the Three Gems: The Buddha, the Sangha (that is the community of followers),

and the Teaching (the Dharma) were used to describe the history and thought of the tradition. At first, I understood the Gem of Teaching to be the remembered words of the Founder, as preserved in the hundreds of Buddhist texts in multiple languages. However, questions arose when I read the opening passages of the Mahayana text named *Perfection of Wisdom* (prajnaparamita). There, I found a more complex view about what constitutes the Teachings. The scene, as depicted in that text, has the Buddha turning to his disciple Subhuti and telling him to teach the community about the Perfection of Wisdom. So, the Sutra not only contains the words of the Buddha but also those of his followers. The fact that the Buddha has turned to Subhuti to be the one to teach, shocks Sariputra, perhaps the most famous of all the disciples of the Buddha and one who is said to be the foremost in his understanding of Wisdom. Sariputra wonders how Subhuti can possibly be asked to teach, especially since he, Sariputra, is present in the assembly. Subhuti is fully aware of the disquiet in Sariputra and probably many others in the group surrounding the Buddha. Subhuti speaks to Sariputra about his concern over what constitutes authentic Teaching of the Dharma. He tells Sariputra and all those in the audience, that if someone teaches in accord with the way things are, that is the reality in which we live and have experience, then what they teach is no different from what the Buddha would teach. This idea implies that the Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha, is always available, because it is constantly reflected in the way things are all around us, not just in the written words of the texts.

When Venerable Hui Dong was kind enough to ask me to give this lecture to Buddhists in North America, he indicated that it would be good to give my own experience with the Dharma. Not being enlightened, I worried that my thoughts may not be a clear and accurate description of the Dharma. I spent several days thinking about this talk and continued to read the description of the encounter between Subhuti and Sariputra. If the Dharma is all around us in everyday life, if it is in the way things are as we live from day to day, how are we to find it? How can we uncover the Dharma in our everyday life? How can we understand the way things are, right now in our experiences? I decided that preparation for this talk was a good opportunity to take a day of my life and see in what ways the teaching, the Dharma, might be exposed in what I think, feel, experience, and consider as just everyday events. I suppose you can say that I kept a diary

of my activities for a day, hoping to have at least one event that could be used to describe the Dharma.

Here is my diary for that day...

Going to bed...

I am something of a night owl and that day starts just after midnight when I go to bed. Sometime during the early morning hours while I am in deep sleep, I have a dream that is upsetting. In my dream, I am searching for my classroom because it is time for me to teach. But no matter where I look, I cannot find the place. Because of the pandemic, I have been teaching from my room on the internet and have not been in a classroom for some years. My brain seems to be reacting...wanting to know why I am not doing what I have done for decades. In my dream, I grow increasingly anxious because I am going to miss my face-to-face class that is waiting for me in a room and it is painful to think that I can't find this room. Suddenly, I wake up and realize what has happened and relax, because I am not missing a class, I am safely in my bed, there are no students waiting for me, there are no consequences.

Where is the Dharma in this dream?

I realize that it is like the Buddhist teaching about “enlightenment.” When I wake up, I am flooded with the insight that my dream is just an “empty” construction of my brain. Recognizing that my experience, racing around in a strange building endlessly searching for the classroom, is “empty,” I am immediately free of the suffering that arose when I believed myself failing to do my job. I lay there in my comfortable bed in a state of relaxed joy because I realized there was no class waiting for me, no building with numerous long halls that are strange and impossible to navigate, no consequences. All is well and I am smiling at the thought. As I, on awakening, have this insight, I am in one sense enlightened. The word “Buddha” comes from the root that means “to awaken.” I am surprised that even before I am awake and out of my bed, some aspects of Dharma have already arisen in my experience.

It reminds me of the passage in the famous *Heart Sutra*, “The Bodhisattva

Avalokitesvara realizes that all the aspects of experience are empty and in that moment he is free of suffering.” I woke up from a dream state and had a moment of joy as my anxiety about missing a class was no longer an issue. When I described this dream to a friend, he sent me a film clip from the movie *Top Secret*, starring the actor Val Kilmer. In the scene, the hero is being beaten by Nazi soldiers who are trying to get him to divulge the *Top Secret*. The torture is so extreme that he faints and becomes unconscious. During the time he has lost consciousness, he has a dream. In his dream, he is walking down a long hall and asks another student, “Where is the exam?” The student replies, “The exam is over, you missed it.” The dreamer is very upset and bemoans the fact that he has missed an exam and the consequences are going to be severe for his grade and his future. Then he comes to his awareness and the guards are still beating and kicking him. To their amazement he smiles and his face beams with happiness. He realizes that he didn’t miss the exam, there is no problem and even though he is being tortured, he smiles in delight. As the Dalai Lama once said, “Pain is inevitable, Suffering is optional.”

Avalokitesvara did more than wake up from a dream, his awakening was from a conscious state in which all the aspects of experience are fully operational. When he realizes that all these experiences are “empty,” he is freed from suffering. I don’t mean to imply that my dream event is equal to what Avalokitesvara experienced, but it has certainly helped me to have a better idea of what the sutra passage describes.

The next moment in my day is:

Getting out of the bed...

As I get up from the bed, my first act is to reach for my cane to help me reach my walker. In doing so, I am coming face to face with the Three Great Messengers of Buddhism: Illness, Old Age, and Death. The need to walk with a cane is because I have the illness of Peripheral Neuropathy where my feet are numb and I have a significant loss of balance, hence the need for a cane. Nearing 90, the Messenger of Old Age is ever near to remind me of the weakness in my body and the nearness of Death. Just as Sakyamuni in his youth met the Three

Great Messengers when he went out riding and saw a sick person, an old person, and a corpse, so I meet two of them as I struggle to stand up and start the day. So, to my surprise, even before I start the day's activities, I have already come in contact with the Dharma in the experience of the emptiness of my dream event and the joy that recognition of that emptiness gave me. And, as I get out of bed and start to dress for the day, Old Age and Illness are there waiting for me.

The day is beginning...

Outside the front door, a hummingbird has built a tiny nest hidden away in the leaves of a bamboo plant. For a few weeks, I have watched the construction of the nest, the laying of two tiny eggs and the arrival of two chicks who peck their way out when they hatch. They have grown too large for both to stay in the nest and as they grow they begin to flap their wings. Today, they have both left the nest and stood on the nearby branch and fluttered from the branch back to the nest. Then, both of them fly up to a high branch and they seem ready to go out into the world. Sure enough, later in the day, I look for them and they are gone.

My learning of the Dharma from the hummingbirds is: Everything changes and nothing remains static. The tiny birds have undergone growth every day and when they are no longer just nestlings, it is time for them to leave. I am sad to see them go. We all face something similar with our children, they don't remain infants, toddlers, youngsters, they mature and change, and have to go out into the world to find their destiny. The "empty nest" is teaching us that everything undergoes change in every moment and the acceptance of this reality is a major step in our own development. The great lesson to be learned from this is detachment. I could have caught the two birds and kept them. However, I can't think of anything more cruel than putting those two young hummingbirds in a cage. I remember when I first wanted to go away from home and take a journey into the world on my own. While I am sad to see the birds leave, I also give them my wish for a full life out there as they fly. Their process of maturity has given me insight into the reality of constant change and the need to be able to detach from a wish to hold on to things even when it is inappropriate and damaging.

Getting an email...

My next event for the day is receiving an email from the doctor at UCLA telling me that my blood sample has been sent to the lab to see if my Neuropathy is related to my genes. Have I inherited the illness? In this new era of DNA, it is possible to identify “spikes” in the genetic sequence that indicates a potential for certain diseases. At this point in time, there is nothing to be done for me from the results. However, the data will be included in research for future methods of treatment and my descendants can be aware that this tendency exists, and they will understand what is happening if symptoms occur in them.

The Buddhists teach that we are born into this world in many ways dependent upon actions of the past, Karma. The presence of certain structures in my DNA are tied to ancient patterns and events that still have an impact on me. The email from the doctor has reminded me of my karmic heritage.

Doctor's appointment...

My next event is an appointment with a Physical Therapist who is giving me exercises to improve my balance and perhaps help prevent falling. As I enter his treatment room, I already know from previous sessions that he is a very good teacher, who has the ability to train my body and brain. The idea that a teacher is like a doctor, brings to mind passages in the texts describing the Buddha to be like a doctor, who has knowledge of what is needed by a patient, what medicines, what Teachings, will be effective. This idea uses the metaphor that the Buddha has the ability to cure the illness of ignorance with his teachings. The word in Buddhist literature for this “skill in teaching” is Upaya. My Therapist has skill and knowledge, in his care I experience the great value of having a teacher who has skill, *Upaya*.

While doing one of the exercises, I am very taken aback when he says to me, “Lew, stop trying to think about your balance. You can’t think of balance. By the time you think ‘I must lean to the left or right,’ it will be too late and you will be on the ground.” He has me stand on a soft foam mat, close my eyes, and just stand still. My body starts to sway and wobble, and he again says, “Don’t

think, just let your body wobble. The brain is already at work figuring out how to give impulses for your balance.” One of the great insights about cognition in the Buddhist tradition is the value of consciousness without the content of my thinking in words and sentences. I find myself standing on a foam pad allowing my body to wobble without consciously controlling it. With this comes the realization that my ego, my self, is not in control but the minute there is the thought, “I can do this, I will stand in perfect balance,” I have to grab the bar to keep myself from falling. The treatment is as much training my brain as it is focused on the body. It is like meditation, freeing my mind of all thoughts, ceasing to exert my self-control, and letting my body and brain learn how to give me balance.

Going to the grocery store...

I am searching for a product that is a substitute for eggs. While I am a vegan, I do admit to having a longing for scrambled eggs or an omelet. One day, I came across an egg substitute that is made from plants. The substitute allows me to stay with a plant based diet but have an experience that is close to my old favorite egg dishes. As I enter the store, I am anxious to find my substitute and immediately head for the shelf where it is displayed. When I get there, none of the containers that I want are there. Even when I find a staff member of the store and ask if there are some in the storage room, the answer is “No, we are all out of the product.” My desires are not being met and I suffer. The first sentence that the Buddha taught was “There is suffering, *dukkha*.” We translate the word *dukkha* as “suffering” but it also means disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration. My desire to have something that is not available, had left me with dissatisfaction. The rest of my time in the grocery store is marked by a frown as I suffer from my unmet desire. You might say that this is an insignificant thing, but it taught me that desire is at the root of dissatisfaction and disappointment.

The day is passing...

In the late afternoon, it is time for a walk. Everyday, I aim to walk for one mile. Since I am hemmed in by busy streets and highways, my walk is over the

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same “mile” of short residential streets, day after day. It has turned out to be interesting rather than boring. Walking the same streets every day means that my neighbors have come to recognize me. Not only recognize me but they have begun to come out when I pass by and greet me. My walking has become a neighborhood event. Along the way, there is a young boy and his sister who often look out for me so they can say “Hi.” On this day, they are very excited to show me a new purchase. They have both been given large plastic swords. The boy is wielding his with great energy. Being an observant person, he must have seen a flicker of a shadow as I looked at the sword and he quickly assured me, “This sword only helps, it does not destroy.”

In my room I have a beautiful image of the Bodhisattva Manjusri that was a gift from Professor Miroj Shakya at University of the West. Manjusri holds a long sword. The sword is a metaphor for the teaching, the Dharma, that is used to cut the bonds that tie us to ignorance. Manjusri’s sword only helps, it does not destroy, and it does not kill. On this day’s walk, my young neighbor has reminded me of Manjusri’s sword, Manjusri’s teaching.

Doing Wordle...

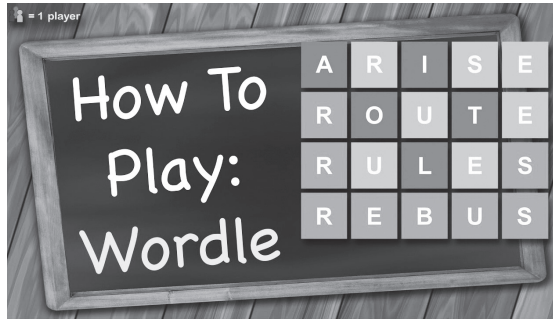
The last event before returning once again to slumber, is to do a puzzle, called Wordle. I have six tries to guess the word of the day. Everyone in the world who does the puzzle, and there are millions doing it daily, seeking the same word. So, I end my day aware of having the same problem as thousands of others in the world. My puzzle helps me to remember that there are millions out there like myself just trying to find a solution to problems that are common to us all. When I have solved the puzzle, found the word for this day, I finally head back to bed, smiling at the thought of success, and having shared a moment of equality with many other humans on this earth who have found the word.

So, this was my diary for the day...

In recording the events, I am not intending to just give you a glimpse of my day. My goal was to find evidence of the Dharma, such as impermanence, constant

change, karmic influences from the past, cutting our bonds to ignorance, healing the illness of ignorance, compassion for the suffering we share with others, and realization of the true nature of self. The Dharma was to my surprise to be seen everywhere: in my dream; my waking up; my standing up; my observation

of hummingbirds; my medical appointment; a neighbor's toy; my solving of a word puzzle. My goal had been to find one example of the Dharma showing itself in an ordinary event of the everyday world. Instead, I couldn't seem to find an example where the Dharma was missing from an experience. If I can be aware of the reality of things as they are, then just living my life day by day is filled with constant teachings. I now know that the Dharma, the reality of the way things really are, will be waiting for me tomorrow in a whole host of different forms. Buddhism is indeed an "everyday" matter. The Dharma is not just in texts, not just expressed in a temple or monastery, not just a sacred ritual, it is in our daily experiences. It is with us at every moment. It is with us now.



Millions of people around the world play Wordle every day.