

# Dharma - With-World (\*) - Engagement

## Vision & mission of the working group 'Buddhism & Environment' of 'German Buddhist Union' (DBU)

*The working group 'Buddhism & Environment' (WG-B&E) uses the teaching of the Buddha (Dharma) as a basis for a precise analysis of our actual lifestyle as well as a source of power for an ecological healing engagement. Starting point of her work is a dilemma: If mankind will not change the way of dealing with the planet earth pretty soon and on a fundamental level, we will be forced into this change. Buddhas teaching offers insight and practical and serious ways to realize this dilemma and to overcome it early enough and voluntarily.*

If we continue as usual, our civilisation will be destroyed.  
(Thich Nhat Hanh; Hanoi, April 25th 2007)

I have been thinking thoroughly for 60 years.  
And the crucial insight is to understand: nothing exists separately.  
(Dalai Lama)

Everything what shall have a larger effect, has to start in the single person and has to be realized by the single person. There is no other way of realization, there will be no change in institutions or in prevailing mentality, there will be no advance and improvement in any considered kind of field, if the starting point of resolving and for a general change is not transferred into the individual person.  
(Jean Gebser)

The more you love Mother Earth, the less you will want to take what you do not need.  
(The Mindfulness Bell; Summer 2018; Issue 78; Page 46)

### I. Dharma

The teaching of the Buddha serves as a basis for the work of the DBU-group 'Buddhism & Environment' (WG-B&E), because the Buddha-Dharma looks deeply into all the beauty and inconsistency of existence. The Dharma addresses the ability of humans, to dedicate themselves consciously to daily life and to life as a whole. Buddhas insights help to overcome the supposed separation of mankind and environment in favour of the knowing feeling of interdependent co-arising (*pratitya samutpada*), which can be described with terms such as oneness, interbeing or entire inclusion. Permanent change or impermanence (*anitya*) and the absence of a separate self (*anatman*) in the literal sense of a complete unity are the fundamental characteristics of existence.

Individuals and society are a living and vivid unity. Dharma practitioners put this rich relationship into practice by loving the earth as a common home, by cultivating an universal responsibility and by expressing a thought-out, careful and gentle way of dealing with natural processes.

This powerful and creative cooperation of mind and action is expressed in the slogan of the WG-B&E: 'Dharma - With-World (\*) - Engagement'. If humans try hard to align their action with the welfare of all beings, they combine a

mindful lifestyle with the wish for social and ecological change on the basis of an ethical attitude.

In this way it's possible to transfer a growth-fixated economy into a culture of enough, which aligns with the practice of Buddhas 'Middle Way'. Both practices and methods which invite cooperation on a local and personal level as well as reason- and compassion-based experiences and narratives can be equally rich influences on the individual route this path takes.

By placing the interaction between humans and nature at the center of its considerations and explaining it without dogma and prejudice, the Dharma can be understood and practiced as a uncomplicated 'secular' philosophy, which need not fear scientific examination.

## II. Our shared world

Meditation and mindfulness are the essential practices of the Dharma. The training of inner silence (*samatha*) enables every person to look at their state of living in an unbiased way (*vipassana*). After that, existential crises like climate change, global heating, extinction of species and lack of resources cannot be denied any longer. Incredible social inequality and the wholesale mortgaging off of the future can also no longer be denied. The same thing is true for dangers like resistant bacteria, ABC-weapons and genetic manipulation (to which Covid-19-viruses points)

Any analysis of these problems demonstrates, that humanity is stuck in a dilemma. If we don't change our daily habits voluntarily, a change will be forced on us by shortages tipping points and catastrophes. The upcoming change is not a rescue operation. It's more the resolving of a paradox: We must want a change, before this change is dictated by the laws of nature. Just like the German saying: 'Life jolts latecomers into action'. We must act before it is too late and be active instead of re-active.

It's not easy to translate this project into practice. Repair is not enough for a sustainable change and development. We need a very large, comprehensive and deep transformation, which includes the basis of our social existence.

A thorough examination of reality shows us the closeness and unity of all human beings and their dependence on the biosphere. We recognize, that everyone is part of a boat called 'With-World', 'our shared world' or 'civilisation'. Fiercely rowing we are heading in the direction of a hurricane. And we fail to see, that the boat can not turn around by itself.

This turn-around will only succeed if the rowers do it by themselves. It depends on their intentions. To understand the power and the effect of these intentions, the WG-B&E centers its thoughts and action on the following question: "What

motivates a single human being, what motivates humanity to choose this dangerous and painful course - and to maintain it?“.

Buddhas teaching offers clear answers. On the individual level it explains the motivation and goals of this action with greed (desire), hatred (jealousy) and blindness (ignorance). We can also use words like craving, clinging and erring or egoism, aggression and arrogance. If we exemplify this as ‘wanting to have more‘, ‘wanting to have more than others‘ and ‘denying consequences‘, we start to realize their social and economical dimension, and how they have become part of our daily behavior.

On a general or social level, greed manifests itself as the systematic pursuit of growth and expansion. Aggression has established itself as mutual competition and the systematic exploitation of our planet. And overvaluation of the self leads to constant trivializing of the consequences of our efforts. The retroactive dimension of these principles on individuals constantly pushes our civilisation in the same fatal direction.

Especially people in rich countries break the longterm permissible ecological footprint in an extreme way. They have lost their inner contact to the world and the limits of our planet. They ignore the fact, that each can they throw into the woods will ultimately hit them on the head.

### **III. Engagement**

The importance of the role of the Dharma for ecological engagement should neither be underestimated nor overestimated. Dharma-practice may support pre-existing initiatives. And reflective thinking in a Sangha makes it easier to inspect activities which are supposed to be sustainable, for contradictions and loopholes and to reveal green-washing and rebound-effects.

Essentially however, the teaching of the Buddha is responsible more for spiritual support and to help understand the roots of the problems, deep in humanity. The Dharma can make us aware of our responsibility for the environment, remind us about inclusion and inter-being and strengthen our mental resilience. Furthermore it supports the mutual interdependency between spirituality and engagement in an intellectually honest way. By acting mindfully and reasonably, we automatically combine awareness with respect and acceptance and any action with the whole richness of existence.

Therefore all Dharma-insight and practices are extremely well-suited to the search for the fundamentals of life - during the phase of a great transformation as well as after it. Just remember Buddhas high esteem for the human talents of love, compassion, joy and equanimity (*brahmaviharas*). These states of mind can serve as ethical guidelines when we want to engage in overcoming the dilemma of our time: to change our life on every level, before the limits of biosphere force us to do so.

Even though all humans are confronted with the demanding challenge of changing their lifestyle radically, the WG-B&E does not want to force anyone towards any particular action. It will however look at general and individual contradictions by publishing recommendations and explaining proposals, such as:

1. Existential social and ecological problems can only be solved by changing the motivation and goals, which have led to these problems.
2. The development of a ‘culture of enough‘ is possible, if we practice mindfulness on the basis of modesty, contentment and great foresight. Someone who is able to live a good life with light luggage, knows very well, that the world fundamentally contains everything necessary to enjoy being active within it (*samtusta* (\*\*)).
3. Working together is better. An orientation towards public welfare can lead to the creation of sharing-groups, neighborhoods, eco-villages, solidary agriculture, vegetarian diet ... .
4. No one should wait for ‘the politic‘, ‘the society‘ and ‘the other‘, but start on his/her own to live in an adequate ecological way, which is grandchildren-friendly.
5. Ultimately engagement in cooperatives, ecological parties, Friday for future, Xtinction rebellion, Greenpeace and other organizations is imperative.
6. The WG-B&E will develop its own projects, support members of ‘German Buddhist Union‘ and connect with other active groups. It will create stimulus and be active locally (\*\*).

The Buddha-Dharma may serve as an essential source of energy for preparation and implementation of the forthcoming ‘Great Transformation‘ in many aspects of our life (economy, culture, consumption etc.). The WG-B&E especially wants to point out the following essential contributions of the Dharma:

1. Every investigation of individual and social problems with Dharma-methods will penetrate through to the causes (principle of cause and effect).
2. It is the essence of Dharma, to use the individual’s own existential interconnectedness with the world as a base to take on the responsibility for his or her self and - at the same time - for all other beings (including those in the future).
3. With Dharma we can understand the underlying driving forces and structures of the current existing economic system (‘Greed-Economy‘) as motives of the involved humans. And we can reorganize both.
4. In accordance with the Dharma, the ‘Middle Way‘ is a convincing basis for a lifestyle which strives for a sustainable civilisation (‘culture of enough‘).
5. Because Dharma-practice touches our mind in an open and direct way, it helps to transform our usual reactions to impulses and wishes into a conscious way of acting with integrity.
6. The paradox to be obliged to want a change, is resolved with the slogan:  
‘Doing the wholesome, avoiding the unwholesome - this is the teaching of the Buddha‘.  
Dharma without engagement is not Dharma.

(\*) The german word for ‘environment‘ is ‘Umwelt‘. That means ‘the world around me‘. The word ‘Mitwelt‘ is including me - the world with me: ‘With-World‘.

(\*\*) In *aryavamsa-sutra* the word *samtusta* explains ‘four noble customs‘: ‘Monk is satisfied with clothing, monk is satisfied with donated food, monk is satisfied with bed and seat, monk finds joy in achieving (german: bewirken)‘.

(\*\*\*) see <https://buddhismus-deutschland.de/ag-umwelt/>.