

Buddhism and the Environment: a Buddhist Approach to the Possible Solutions

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Crisis or crises?

The word “crisis” is on everyone’s lips. But what crisis? Climate? Biodiversity? Ecology? Politics? Values ? Sometimes the word “revolution” is used – industrial, agricultural, cultural, green revolutions... offered as so many solutions to our difficulties. But far from disappearing, the crises multiply.

Maybe we are entering a critical period for our whole civilization, an oil-based civilization on the point of extinction? The stakes are incredibly high; what is in question is indeed the survival of human civilization as such and of one of the millions of species living on this planet. A few rare species are known to be particularly invasive: sea-weed along certain coasts... and the human race over the whole planet. The former does not actually endanger the survival of other species, whereas mankind is verifiably destructive on a planetary scale.

An invisible and precious companion

In French, “gold” is used to qualify various substances, beside the metal itself (yellow gold): black gold (oil), blue gold (water), green gold (plant-life)... As though nature produced various kinds of “gold”, value-less at one point, of great worth at another. The value is relative, depending on prices at any particular moment. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, what has a price does not necessarily have worth. Might there be a kind of gold, with no value but of true, enduring worth? If “gold” of this kind exists, it would have to be invisible, impalpable, with neither weight nor measure, a tasteless, odor-less quantity to which no price could ever be attached. Does such a quantity exist? A comparison may help.

At Grenoble in France, scientists have built a huge machine, the European synchrotron, the result of the work of physicists drawn from twelve nations. The aim is to observe the effects of particles which are not directly observable. In other words, the effects are observed in order to deduce the particles’ existence. Is not this also true of the mind? It too cannot be observed directly or with the help of instruments. Yet it has visible effects on mood which in turn affects states of health, attitudes and behavior. Mind - invisible, impalpable, intangible- is nevertheless a fantastic source of energy, of limitless creativity and innumerable activities. In so far as it has no price, may it not have true worth in proportion to its immense potentiality?

We all possess this instrument of great price, our mind, which paradoxically can never be bought. Maybe what is free is what has worth? The idea is attractive.

Let us keep the idea of gratuitousness in mind. It will prove to be a powerful remedy against the present crisis in the dominant culture of the 21st century, as we shall see later.

So, what can we do?

In our search for solutions to the problems of the present day, does Buddhism have any contribution to make? Buddhism is founded on the Buddha, his teachings and their practice. Even though the Buddha has the power to eliminate suffering and the causes of suffering for numberless sentient beings, even though he has the remedies

against all difficulties, he can do nothing without the collaboration of those beings. Was this not the case, in his infinite compassion, he would have used his power and there would be no suffering on earth. We have to admit that this is not the case. A remedy has to be correctly dosed and effectively used by those who need it. Even the Buddha cannot force anyone to take medicine. Indeed, some even take poison instead. False views, aggressivity, pride and greed lead human beings into error, as we can see in the way they treat nature.

The destruction of the planet could be halted simply by respecting all forms of life, including our own. Instead of which, the lack of respect, the destruction of species by wrong-thinking, humans threaten their own lives.

Attacking the cause of wrong-doing, the Buddha defined three poisons: ignorance or wrong views, greed and the rejection leading to hatred. The first of these is the cause of the other two. Ignorance is difficult to eliminate, the other two are more accessible. If we explore their mechanisms, this could give us considerable social leverage. If we could control greed, individual efforts could be put to the service of society, at the same time, giving Buddhists an excellent opportunity for social action.

We need to transform our modes of thoughts, think about present paradigms, outrageously dominated by science, and invent healthier solutions. This does not mean rejecting science and scientific research, but re-orientating them towards greater humanism and long-term general interest, rather than aiming at short-term financial gain for a few.

Various religious and philosophical traditions are helpful. What follows is based on Buddhism.

We should be careful not to be entrapped into thinking that the Buddha's teaching is the only solution to the world's problems and that all we need do is follow his advice. Buddhists who are not even capable of agreeing on the Buddha's date of birth are not likely to agree on the much more difficult problems of peace and well-being in the world. We find it difficult to eliminate our own suffering: how can we expect to relieve the sufferings of the world? Nevertheless it is our duty to make an active Buddhist contribution to the emergence of 21st century civilization and world governance.

Let us be humble and realistic. Did not the Buddha say that his teaching was difficult to apprehend, that through it, those who are in the right will not be more so, and those who are in the wrong not less, but that for those who are in doubt it may be of help? Did he not give different levels of teaching, some times even contradictory teachings, since they were addressed to different audiences needing different methods?

It follows that not only what we propose is not universally applicable but also that what is valid for some people may not be valid for others. The title of Coline Serreau's latest film « Solutions locales pour un désordre global » ("Local solutions for global disorder") admirably illustrates this point. The highest priority nevertheless is to reduce global disorder and this should be a good index of social development.

Here and there in the world, people are raising anxious voices to denounce increasing problems and to propose solutions. Mobilization of citizens has never been stronger: over a million associations and groups are working towards peace and a better world, encouraged by Internet. Generous ideas, powerful new concepts have appeared: economic solidarity, mutualization of means, alternative money systems, boosting of social links, etc. All these efforts however prove to be insufficient and the degradation of conditions continues. More than ever, citizen movements, with Buddhists all over the world, must pursue their progress.

Underlying ideas are crucial. The idea of interdependence, fundamental in Buddhism, is of prime importance. For scientists, the notion is also central. I am utterly

convinced that understanding interdependence will be decisive for the future of our world, as it becomes too small to accommodate its population of seven billion, all eager to profit from its rich resources.

According to Albert Einstein, a problem which has been created cannot be resolved if we continue to think in the way which created the problem in the first place. Reflection precedes ideas which generate motivation, leading to acts and their results. Some will prove to be problems, others solutions. What is important is the type of reflection at the source. If our way of thinking creates problems, it cannot also find solutions. In face of all the problems confronting us, we need to change the way we think. Quite simply, we need to invent a new ideal, a model of society firmly based on furthering the interests of its members.

The consequences of actions cannot be divorced from other acts. Everyone knows that planting a tree in summer or in winter is not the same, certain times are more favorable than others. Nor can a tree plant itself by itself. Many conditions, or tools, are necessary.

In the same way, many conditions are required for an action to be accomplished. Even though they may not be perceived consciously, they are none-the-less necessary. All these causes and conditions come together in the human mind, engendering decisions and action. Acts are the fruits of thoughts which therefore in the last resort fashion the material world in which we live.

External events demonstrably affect the ideas which cross our minds; we know that our mode of thinking depends on circumstances and in particular on our relationship to others. Without this human contact, our ideas would not be the same, in such a way that no idea is engendered entirely by ourself alone. So it cannot be said to belong to any one person since without others it would not have arisen. It is, as it were, joint-owned, born of the interdependence of phenomena and exchange with others.

In this respect, the notion of intellectual property is one of the most farcical inventions of the human mind. A whole sophisticated legal arsenal exists to appropriate what in reality belongs to no-one: water, earth, plants... In the present day, all that nature offers for free becomes the property of certain individuals – by what right? Are not ideas also a common human heritage, since no-one can really materially possess them?

On the other hand, anyone can seek inspiration in valuable ideas, entirely free of charge. They are a gift of life, offered to all, never restricted to any one person. Immaterial, an idea is at the disposition of an infinity of human beings for, contrary to material resources, it cannot be depleted. It is an available and inexhaustible source of energy, the energy of life itself informing individuals to act and fashion the world. But today everything is subject to financial transaction. An idea is bought and sold, even though, as we have seen, it cannot truly belong to the person it came from. If we pool our ideas and share our experiences, our mutual enrichment would be beyond price.

The benefits of science and technology are indisputable and cannot be dispensed with. Nevertheless at the same time, the damage caused is such that we are endangering all life on earth. 30% of the species has disappeared over the last century, and scientists predict that 50% will be reached by 2050¹, even though the speed of change and the complexity of the equations involved make exact prediction impossible. Estimations of the present rate of extinction vary from 50 to 1000 times the natural rhythm. One thing is certain: unless we change our behavior and way of life, the situation will not improve and the planet runs a real risk of desertification. The disappearance of species is the most disastrous result of the degradation of the biosphere.

¹ Jean-Marie PELT, a famous chemist, botanist and ecologist, *Planète vivante*, (Living Planet) 30 years of WWF (2010) and 3D Territories, Save the biodiversity (2008).

Let us take a look at the damage inflicted on the environment towards the end of the last century and continuing inexorably today. We shall try to understand the mechanisms involved and I suggest a few solutions.

The ecological situation

His Holiness Sakya Trizin, a great Tibetan Buddhist master, has written a prayer entitled “Ecological crisis: an aspirational prayer” be resumed as follows:

“Because of an enormous quantity of degenerate activities, extreme avidity leads some people to cover world resources for themselves. Trees and forests are cut down, upsetting the balance of the water element and rainfall. Unlimited excavations of mines and quarries disturb the dwellings of local celestial, terrestrial or water spirits. Innumerable factories produce clouds of smoke, polluting the air and causing unprecedented illness. Devastation of the physical world and its organisms upsets the balance of the four natural elements. Machines working at all times and in all places melt the mountain snow. The natural protection of the ozone layer has been perforated, allowing the appearance of incurable skin diseases. The world is threatened with rapid desertification through the consequences of powerful unsatisfied desires. May the Three Jewels protect us and may the negative actions, the cause of all this, come to an end”.

Scientists all over the world unfortunately confirm this alarming tableau. Their harsh and somber findings terrify many of them. Without falling prey to exaggeration, we need to be realistic. The Buddha himself pointed out the terrible sufferings of samsara in the first Noble Truth at the beginning of his teachings. We need to be lucid and reflect with honesty, realism and courage on the unheard-of damage inflicted on the planet by our oil-based civilization.

What is the order of gravity of these threats? Not much research has been done in this field, but many people would put in prime position the looming energy crisis due to the exhaustion of cheap oil supplies which seem to have peaked. This is a serious menace since 95 % of the dominant world civilization is oil-dependant. Chris Skrebowski, the editor in chief of Petroleum Review, believes the oil peak will lead to social and economic chaos.

In second place: the problem of global-warming which receives more media attention than oil. This is all the more difficult to understand in that the over-consumption of oil is largely responsible for climate change. Rob Hopkins in « Manuel de transition - de la dépendance au pétrole à la résilience locale » (Transition Handbook – from oil to local resilience) writes that, contrary to global warming well relayed by the media, the oil peak has yet to make its appearance as major problem.

Like Rob Hopkins, I am far from being an expert on the question of oil. But simply by taking note of the state of nature, expert analyses and the retail price of petrol, one hardly needs great erudition to conclude that the price of the barrel of oil has entered a lasting inflationary phase. The last peak was noted in 2008 when the price of the barrel of crude oil reached a summit of over 132 \$, causing world-wide anxiety. Yet we seem strangely calm in view of the present steady rise in price since 2009 when the barrel was trading at 90 \$, a price higher than ever before except during the 2008 crisis. We have indisputably come to the end of cheap oil, a period predicted in the 1940's by Marion King Hubbert, an American geophysicist, in his famous curve known as the Hubbert peak, presented in 1956 to the American Petroleum Institute. The peak was predicted around the year 2010.

In response to this oil crisis, exploitation of non conventional sources has now begun, since they are becoming financially competitive. But these oils are more expensive, since they are difficult to extract and refine and are not without risk. We are talking here about deep off-shore wells, bituminous sands and schists and heavy oils. April 2010 saw the worst accidental oil leakage in the whole history of deep off-shore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. At depths of more than 200 m divers cannot stop a leak; in the Gulf of Mexico the leak was 1500 m under water. Coastal ecosystems will suffer from the disastrous consequences for decades at least. In spite of this, permission to drill in the previously protected Arctic zone has been granted to oil companies. An ironic stroke of fate, for without global warming, this frozen and inaccessible area could not have been exploited, whereas now it has become a source of exacerbated tension and conflict among countries around the whole zone, each laying claim to the sea-bed.

There is a long list of the aberrations of an industrial system entirely unaware of the danger it represents for the biosphere and species. Modern industry, in pursuit of short-term profit, lays a heavy burden on our generation and, more dramatically still, on those of the future.

Oil is a limited resource produced over hundreds of millions of years. Every day, more than 85 million barrels of oil are used in the world, 44 % in the form of petrol, 35 % in other forms of fuel. The rest includes black road products (asphalt, bitumen, tars...) agricultural uses (fertilizers, pesticides, equipment), alimentary additives and conserving agents, plastics and polymers, cosmetics, clothing (nylon, polyester) and thousands of other products. Our dependence on oil is immense. And unfortunately we do not really know how to enter the transitional period needed if we are to wean ourselves off this energy source in favor of a sustainable and balanced future.

This chapter would not be complete without a study of global warming and its dramatic and unpredictable consequences. But since this question has been widely studied scientifically and relayed politically, the general public is familiar with it. We do not need to go into the problem further.

Oil crisis, global warming – are these head of our list of threats? Grave as they are, others may be more serious.

Oil is, as we know, *casus belli*, but access to water is also the cause of warfare. Of the 70 % of the earth's surface consisting of water, 2,5 % is fresh water and only 10 % of that, drinking water. This represents 0, 25 % of the total. In France, rivers and phreatic water are 70 % polluted. Fresh water consumption by industry, agriculture and households represents respectively 20 %, 70 % and 10 %. Even though we need to cut down on domestic use, this is not the main culprit. The same remarks apply to many other industrial nations. 1.1 billion of the earth's 7 billion inhabitants have no access to drinking water. Every year sees 250 million cases of water-linked illness; five million die. 50 % of chemical elements are not eliminated by treatment.

Global warming, deforestation, oceans, refuse, pollution, alimentation, genetic manipulation, nano-technology, desertification, energy, habitat, health, biodiversity: all these present problems which need to be considered. Among them, pollution and the enormous quantity of refuse generated by our civilization should be among our priorities.

Even our fields are polluted, contaminated by an agricultural industry produced by the petro-chemical industry. This should be a major concern. This and the transport systems related to it are responsible for vast quantities of CO² released into the atmosphere, accelerating the rate of global warming, with its resultant desertification.

The recent introduction of chemistry into conventional agriculture has resulted in the use of artificial fertilizers: mainly nitrogen, phosphoric acid and potassium. Wheat which has grown too fast does not stay upright, and, one on the ground cannot be

mechanically harvested. So new varieties of wheat had to be invented to compensate for this effect. Associated grasses were also boosted, leading to the use of herbicides. Without oligo-elements, the balance of the soil is upset, fungi proliferate, infecting the shorter-stemmed wheat even faster. So fungicides are introduced. Insects whose environment is devitalized, invade the wheat –the petro-chemical follows suit with insecticides. And so the wheel comes full circle.

This is not the end of the matter. The soil, 90 % devitalized, dries out and hardens. At present, 40 % of arable land is degraded.

The living layer of soil, to a depth of some 30 cms, is the scene of intense biological activity. 80 % of all living organisms are to be found there: earthworms, bacteria, fungi and myriads of others. The death of the soil begins with biological death, resulting in the disappearance of organic matter, itself the source of food for fauna and microbes. Among the causes: deep ploughing, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides and pesticides. Chemical death follows, elements are washed out. Acidification results from the loss of calcium, the bridging link between clay and humus.

This in turn gives rise to erosion, one of the most serious of dangers. Mixed with rainwater, the clay in suspension form a muddy water draining away silt, sand and pebbles. This is a cause of the serious flooding we are witnessing, even though the planet is experiencing one of its warmest periods. Mankind has invented floods in a dry season! In the last 50 years, it is calculated that the proportion of organic material in the soil has been reduced from 4 % to 1,4 %. We are presently losing on average 40 tons of soil per hectare and per annum². Erosion in France affects 60 % of soils. If this continues, in three centuries, France will resemble the Sahara!

Add to this somber picture, a market invaded by hybrid seeds. The seeds are rendered sterile, thus preventing cultivators from reserving part of their grain for planting in the next season. The aim is to sell grain every year, making world agriculture dependant on the producers of seed. The varieties produced moreover often require great quantities of water which in turn benefits the profitable business in irrigation systems. This, as we have seen, consumes 70 % of the world's fresh water resources.

The situation is further aggravated by global warming. The surface of the ocean is not flat, its height increases near the coast-line. Drawn by capillarity inland, salt water invades arable land which is then lost to agriculture.

The introduction of G.M.O. (genetically modified organisms) is a further aggravation. These monocultures are confined to a few cereals: soja, rice, wheat or maize; at the same time they reduce natural biodiversity, compromising the future. Attack by a parasite with acquired resistance could easily ravage a large part of world production, increasing the risk of famine already afflicting 1/6th of the population. Two other types of danger attach to GMO's. Soja for instance, developing resistance to a pesticide, can become a kind of sponge absorbing the pesticide and passing it on into animal food-stuffs and eventually to our own plates. Another category of GMO – Bt cotton for instance-develops its own pesticides so that the poison here persists in the harvest.

Even more incredible, the appearance of nanocides. Fields may be sprayed with nano-particles capable of changing the flavor of plants; with a little persuasion the consumer will appreciate strawberry-flavored beans! Unknown to most of us, this already exists in the agro-alimentary industry. The texture of a food can be made tender or crisp with the help of this technology. The main aim of nanocides is to reduce attack by so-called invasive insects. We have already seen that upsetting the balance of the soil

² Association Kokopelli, biodiversity conservation and seeds of life, France

however in fact favors their proliferation. One bad thing to remedy another: a terminator type of solution proposed by people claiming to serve life-sciences!

The list of products whose names mean « to kill » (-cide) grows longer when it should be decreasing. We have to add nano-particles, physical poisons, to the chemical poisons already in existence. Once in an organism these particles are virtually ineradicable, adding further illness to already enfeebled species. It is not surprising that the WHO estimates that in 10 to 20 years' time 2 out of 3 people will be affected by cancer. A rosy future for our children!

All this leads to a loss in biodiversity and an exponential increase in the rate of extinction, whether we like it or not, the sixth to occur, the extinction of the dinosaurs being the fifth. But this time, mankind is responsible.

Genetic manipulation introduces an even more somber picture, the coup de grâce for many dying species. This is no exaggeration. The danger of speciation already looms. This, the direst, the most serious threat so far, would deserve a whole article. Terrifying research is already underway in laboratories where men, in their folly, believe they can overcome nature and even death itself. Unprecedented ethical dilemmas arise out of the possibility of producing human clones capable of furnishing replacement organs when needed. A glimpse of a hell in which human beings might be capable of "cultivating" others.

Moreover the introduction of nanoparticles in the organism could lead to hybrids in which it would not be possible to distinguish between the biological and the physical. What of reproduction? It is possible to imagine human beings incapable of breeding with existing humans. This is what is meant by speciation. There is a real risk, the consequences of such manipulation being totally unforeseeable.

Who is aware ? There are few warning voices.³ Meanwhile mass conditioning, through media propaganda, continues to be orchestrated by global financial and industrial groups.

One wide-spread error consists in the idea that life-expectancy is on the increase. In Western countries this not the case. On the contrary a regression is observed. The United States in 1950 had a higher life-expectancy than Western Europe; today they take second place. But they were the first to adopt industrial food. In England, life-expectancy is also diminishing. Of all the countries, in Europe, England has most cases of obesity and consumes most industrial food. In France, 17 % of the child population is obese. Many suffer from otitis, bronchiolitis, asthma and various allergies representing more and more severe handicaps. Our hospitals are full of the sick. What does this say about the quality of the food we eat?

Before envisaging solutions, we need to understand the mechanisms involved.

Mechanisms

By way of introduction, I would like to quote a short comment by Albert Einstein in an article published in the Monthly Review in 1949:

“Private capital has a tendency to accumulate in few hands, partly because of competition between capitalists and partly because technological development and increasing division of labor encourage the formation of larger productive units over the smaller. These developments result in an oligarchy of private capital, the exorbitant power of which cannot be controlled effectively even by a society whose politics are democratic”.

³ Pr Gilles Eric Seralini, « Ces OGM qui changent le monde » – Flammarion Editions 2010, (GMOs that change the world: transferring genetic material from humans, dogs or microbes to maize).

Hervé Kempf, a French writer and a journalist with *Le Monde*, has written many books translated into several languages⁴. He reminds us that, from the time of the apogee of the Greek state, three political systems have survived. The first two, monarchy and democracy, are well known. We tend to forget the third: precisely, oligarchy. In this system, a dominant minority takes decisions concerning the greatest number who no choice but to follow suit. In his book, on how the rich destroy the planet, according to the sources he quotes, 52 % of the Gross National Product, the word over, is in the hands of 250 families representing 250 000 firms. Hervé Kempf's attack on capitalism is clear in 2009: "What we are witnessing is not the crisis, but the mutation resulting from the end of capitalism".

Today's "crises" are the result of the transition from capitalism and of the difficulties induced by the oligarchy. In our system of general alienation, movements of resistance with the overthrow of existing governments (as in 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt...) are not surprising. Change is indispensable but it will not be smooth or painless. The inevitable resistance of the oligarchy has probably only just begun.

The mechanisms behind the present situation are chiefly due to the limitless greed of profiteers. The financial and banking systems at its centre have infected the economic structures taking with them a political system which is inter-connected and dependent. In August 1971, President Nixon decreed the inconvertibility of the dollar and gold, instituting a complete dependence of world economy on the American economy. But this economy based on excessive consumerism is running out of steam. And Chinese growth, at present very high, is not sustainable in the long term. It is obvious that the two factors will impose radical changes in the world economy which, at the same time, is coming up against new limits: the natural frontiers of our planet and its biosphere.

It is becoming more and more obvious that a capitalistic civilization based on a market procuring huge profits for a tiny minority against the interests of the majority cannot long survive. Multinational profits have never been at a higher level, for two reasons: delocalization of production to poor countries where workers' rights are badly protected, if at all, so as to take advantage of cheap labor and investment of profit in tax havens. Reduced taxation not only increases share-holders' profits but also limits social investment to the benefit of all citizens. What possible solutions can we envisage?

Solutions

Since our present ills are the result of human activity, the solutions must come from a change in human behavior. Everyone is called upon to contribute, since all are involved: victims of a situation we have ourselves created.

Buddhist Contribution:

Some changes are easy to implement. Certain Buddhist teachers have already made suggestions to their communities, more than a hundred to date, including:

- Reducing meat consumption or becoming vegetarian. This is an act of compassion and lessens one's impact on the depletion of resources. A kilo of beef needs some 100 000 liters of water against 750 liters for the production of a kilo of wheat. Providing vegetarian meals at meetings will reduce one's ecological foot-print.
- Living simply. This puts into practice one's vows of ethical conduct without superfluous possessions.

⁴ « Comment les riches détruisent la planète », 2007 – « Pour sauver la planète, sortez du capitalisme », 2009 – « L'oligarchie ça suffit, vive la démocratie », 2011 Editions du Seuil, Paris (How the rich are destroying the planet, 2007 - Renounce capitalism to save the planet, 2009 - Oligarchy basta, long live democracy, 2011).

- Reducing one's use of plastic. We use plastic packaging for a few hours, sometimes even a few minutes, whereas it takes 500 years to degrade completely. Recycle actively.
- When offerings are made, adopt healthy solutions. Buy fruit rather than sweet things, plant flowers instead of cutting them.
- Plant trees.
- Transform one's mind.

The aim is to encourage a change of direction in the human race. This requires mobilization of ordinary citizens, as we have already seen. A dominant minority does not impose a right direction. For this, much greater awareness is necessary, putting essential emphasis on the role of education.

I have been studying the way our world works and its mechanisms for four years now. Things seem to be becoming clearer and so I feel able to make a few suggestions. These are the fruit of my reflection, to the best of my ability, with the help of many written and visual sources. Willy-nilly I have become a kind of authority in my professional sphere and in various Buddhist institutions (such as the French and the European Buddhist Unions). The ideas I am submitting are not my property for the reasons already given. They have arisen spontaneously, often during the moments of mental repose which in Buddhist practice we call meditation.

The first idea dates back to 1995 when month-long strikes in France paralyzed the whole country. Clarification came as time went by. I have listened carefully to people with a long history of work in associations in favor of conservation. The following is a starting point to be developed by others as they wish.

1. Encouraging an upward trend in group dynamics.

My observations show that groups with a downward trend have more people with negative mental attitudes, little virtue and disrespectful and aggressive tendencies. In these groups, there are fewer people with positive mental attitudes, virtuous and respectful tendencies. If there are 30 % in the first sub-group, 20 % in the second, the remaining 50 % -a peaceful group- are down in the direction of the dominant group. The whole group is dragged down and the percentage of "disturbers" increases. The group with an upward trend does not change but cannot influence others. Reversing this situation is vitally important.

2. Increasing awareness.

In order to encourage positive group dynamics, education is primordial. This needs a theme which is both simple and wide-reaching so that the largest number can adhere to it easily. It should also have a unifying element: the protection of the planet is a good example.

One possibility is to point out that present-day consumption requires the resources of a planet and a half, which is not sustainable. To carry on in this way is suicidal. Everyone can agree on this. From this starting point, a general picture of the present state and its causes will at least impose the urgent necessity of solutions to be found and implemented, even though there may not be complete agreement.

3. Aim.

Rich and poor, religious personalities, industrialists, financiers, the influential and powerful, citizens of the earth, all united to preserve the planet and develop a sustainable society in the 21st century, within the resources of the planet.

4. Federative meetings.

To bring together at top level:

- Religious leaders: the Pope, the Dalai Lama...;
- Winners of the Nobel Peace Prize;
- Industrialists and financiers;
- The world's richest and most influential personalities;
- International Governmental Organizations, UNO, Europe...;
- Representatives of civic society and NGOs.

Heads of State also to be invited.

Increasing awareness, and facilitating the implementation of solutions:

- Presentation of environmental, economic and social conditions by world experts;
- Presentation of the causes of these conditions;
- Presentation of perspectives and solutions toward an equitable division of the fundamental resources of the planet: food and water, lodging, energy and health.

5. Mechanisms

- Development of the idea of gratuitousness. A “ministry of gratuitousness” could be created with the aim of encouraging the free production of the planet's renewable resources.
- Promotion of the idea of “common property”: air, fresh water and drinking water, land, forests, plants, the oceans....
- Introduction of a “minimum of compulsory world service”. Imposing for instance the idea not only of de-pollution, but the avoidance of pollution. Inhabitants of the earth would owe “world service” just as military service organizes the defense of a country. The question here is the defense of the interests of all humanity.

6. To begin with

Aim at long term.

- Creation of a work group charged with implementing this plan, beginning with point 4.
- A budget of 40000 € would be necessary. This would provide for a professional team, under the authority of world Buddhist leaders, charged with studying the feasibility of the project and with establishing links with partners on the international scales.
- Setting up an international network based on local partners. Internet would play an important part.
- Enhancing local projects and creating a world dynamic.
- Bringing together little by little teachers from all the great religious traditions in order to alert religious leaders. Widening gradually to include civic society, political, international organizations, whether various associations or NGOs...
- The signing of a world-citizen program clearly stating a number of short, medium and long-term objectives:

- Leading towards world-wide sustainable management of the common heritage (arable land, biodiversity, traditional practices...);
- Links with the Earth Summit 2012 (Rio+20);
- Television coverage equal to that of major media events such as the Olympic Games with similar coverage by other media ;
- Production of an audio-visual documentary for distribution to citizens of the earth and schools world-wide free of charge.