

# Green Meditation: A Month-Long Retreat with Clark Strand

## Week 4: Green Meditation Overview

For the final week of our online Green Meditation Retreat, the text, the practice, and the image are all the same. The photograph below offers all four:

This photo shows archaeologists from Mary Leakey's 1978 expedition uncovering a 70-meter path of footprints at Laetoli, Tanzania. Preserved in a shallow bed of volcanic ash, those



footprints record a fragment of the Long Green Path through time as it was

walked by a pair of hominids (probably a mother and child) some 3.6 million years ago.

**GREEN MEDITATION TEXT:** We aren't used to thinking of images as "texts"—especially prehistoric images. For one thing, no actual writing is involved. For another, with the possible exception of cave paintings, few prehistoric traces were meant to serve as records, there being no deliberate intention to preserve anything. The Laetoli footprints are a good example. At some point 3.6 million years ago there was a volcanic eruption...followed by a rain that dampened the ash enough to take the imprint of a foot, rather than just scattering with every step...followed by a mother and child who for some reason needed to walk through it—

presumably to get to the other side of all the ash. What they might have thought or felt along the way we have no idea. We know only that they made the journey, and that our journey today is a continuation of theirs. Our text, then, is evidence of the path we have traveled on from deep time. That is its meaning and its message for us today.

PRACTICE: Our practice of Green Meditation is just what we see in this photo—a way of recovering the path through deep time. In Leakey’s case, the project began with a “find.” This was followed with an “excavation.” In the photo we see two archaeologists brushing away dirt and sand so that the footprints of their ancestors can be seen clearly—so that, in effect, they can “follow” where they lead.

Each of these three has its spiritual equivalent where Green Meditation is concerned.

Like the archaeologist, our work begins with a “find”—with the discovery of some trace from deep time. Fortunate-

ly, our spiritual teachings are filled with these, and so once we know what to look for they are not very hard to find. Initially, this is done alone, even if we are surrounded by other spiritual practitioners.

Typically, it happens like this: In the midst of some ritual or recitation we are stuck by an anomaly disguised as a religious “fact”—in other words, something we are meant to take for granted. This could be anything from the Buddha’s half-closed eyelids to Bodhidharma’s meditating in a cave, both of which represent the effort to recover an evolutionary state of consciousness that precedes the dawn of discriminative awareness.

Likewise, a Christian might suddenly wonder how it is possible to be saved by “the body and blood” of Christ. Naturally, her simple faith in this might transform her life in meaningful ways, just as the devout Pure Land Buddhist might develop a spirit of equanimity and compassion as the result of his

confidence in being “saved” by Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. However, were the Christian suddenly to realize that the Eucharist is really a reenactment of the first law of planetary ecology (that everything that eats is also eaten; thus nothing is ever lost or gained), then that single Green Revelation would revolutionize her understanding of the entire Western spiritual canon, revising every aspect of her religion, starting from the ground up. The same could happen for the Pure Land Buddhist who realized that Amida, who vows not to attain enlightenment until all can be reborn in his Western Pure Land, is really the living reality of Nature—in which case, he won’t have to wait for the Pure Land to meet Amida. He can hear him preach nightly in the gentle croaking of frogs.

Of course, the same revelation could come to the Theravada Buddhist who realized that mindfulness of Nature is the only kind there is, or for the Tibetan Buddhist who saw clearly that Chenrezi (Avalokiteshvara) chooses to be reborn

perpetually for the sake of all beings, not because he/she is a spiritual hero, but because that is how the universe actually works.

But all of these begin with a “find” that points us in the direction of deep time.

The work of “excavation” must be done in a discussion group. As in the photo,

to begin with even two group members are enough. The reason is simple.

Green Meditation has been lost to us as the result of our collective anthropocentric thinking. Some solitude is required to see this in the first place, but when it comes to the actual work of recovery, we must find what we lost by retracing our steps, and such a return journey is necessarily undertaken with others.

There is another reason as well. Because it will take a long time to correct humanity’s course through deep time, this work will involve many generations to come. Discussion groups are the best way to accomplish this. Our discussion leaders will be those who can inspire

this kind of long-term inquiry and committed effort over time, those for whom long-term thinking is, in fact, a new kind of religion. Our teachers will be those who are humbled by the scale of such work, but remain courageous in their commitment to one simple but exacting principle: that our theology and our ecology must be one.

The natural result of this process is following a new path which is really the old path—the path followed by our ancient ancestors. This “following” is something we undertake both as individuals and as a group. The maps that emerge from our discussion meetings are even deeper and older than the ancient rituals, practices, and scriptures they linger in as “artifacts.” Together we build confidence in those maps and learn to follow where they lead. Each of us brings something necessary and indispensable to that collective work. The group, in turn, helps to guide and sustain our individual practice over time.

TROUBLESHOOTING: The only ongoing troubleshooting advice that works is to seek community with others interested in practicing Green Meditation so that you have the support of others in finding, recovering, and following the path. Our Green Meditation Society of Woodstock is committed to helping others to form such groups. If you would like information on retreats, support networks, newsletters, podcasts, video or phone teachings, and the emerging body of related literature on Green Meditation, please send your name, address, and phone number to [LongGreenPath@aol.com](mailto:LongGreenPath@aol.com)

Those on Facebook can also join the group Green Meditation Society. A similar group will also be forming shortly on the Tricycle Community.