

Green Meditation: A Month-Long Retreat with Clark Strand

Week 2: Practicing Spiritual Archaeology

Green Meditation is a form of spiritual archaeology, a way of recovering the balance that humanity has lost in its relationship to Nature. Through this practice, not only do we begin to recover that lost balance, we also learn to recover the green teachings associated with it.

Today those teachings remain mostly in the form of “sediment,” spiritual artifacts that linger in our various texts, practices, and traditions long after we have forgotten what they were for. To recover those artifacts occasionally requires some digging, but for the most part they lie right on the surface. If we know what to look for, we find them. If not, we don’t.

PRACTICE: As a green artifact, this week’s text lies in plain view along a path that many Buddhists walk daily as a part of their meditation practice. Our practice for Week 2 is to recover that artifact (The Heart Sutra) and to recite it by twilight—either in its entirety, or simply the highlighted portion, repeating it like a mantra. Please note that in our version of the Heart Sutra one crucial word has been modified, making it possible to recover the green dharma still preserved in this ancient teaching. If you are used to a different translation of the sutra, feel free to use it. Simply modify the text before you begin, replacing the words “sunyata” or “emptiness” with Nature. Your “twilight” reading can take place at dusk or dawn, or in the middle of the night, using enough artificial lighting to read by but no more. As always, natural light is best; memorization of the text is even better.

One further note: The opening words of the sutra (which comprise its title) are usually translated “Great Perfection of Wisdom.” However, *Maha Prajna Paramita* can also be translated “Great Mother (or Womb) of All Buddhas,” in keeping with the older meaning of the sutra. Therefore, if you wish, you may also substitute “Mother of Buddhas” or “Womb of Buddhas” for *prajna paramita* throughout the text.

GREEN MEDITATION TEXT:

Maha Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra

Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, doing deep prajna paramita, clearly saw that the five skandas are nature, thus transcending misfortune and suffering.

“O, Sariputra, form is no other than nature, nature is no other than form. Form is exactly nature, nature exactly form. Feeling, thought, volition and consciousness are likewise like this.

“O, Sariputra, remember, Dharma is fundamentally nature: No birth, no death. Nothing is defiled, nothing is pure. Nothing can increase, nothing can decrease. Hence, in nature, no form, no feeling, no thought, no volition, no consciousness. No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind. No seeing, no hearing, no smelling, no tasting, no touching, no thinking. No world of sight, no world of consciousness. No ignorance, and no end to ignorance. No old age and death and no end to old age and death. No suffering, no craving, no extinction, no path, no wisdom, no attainment. Indeed, there is nothing to be obtained. The Bodhisattva relies on prajna paramita with no hindrance in the mind. No hindrance, therefore no fear. Far beyond upside down views, at last nirvana. Past, present and future, all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas rely on prajna paramita and therefore reach the most supreme enlightenment.

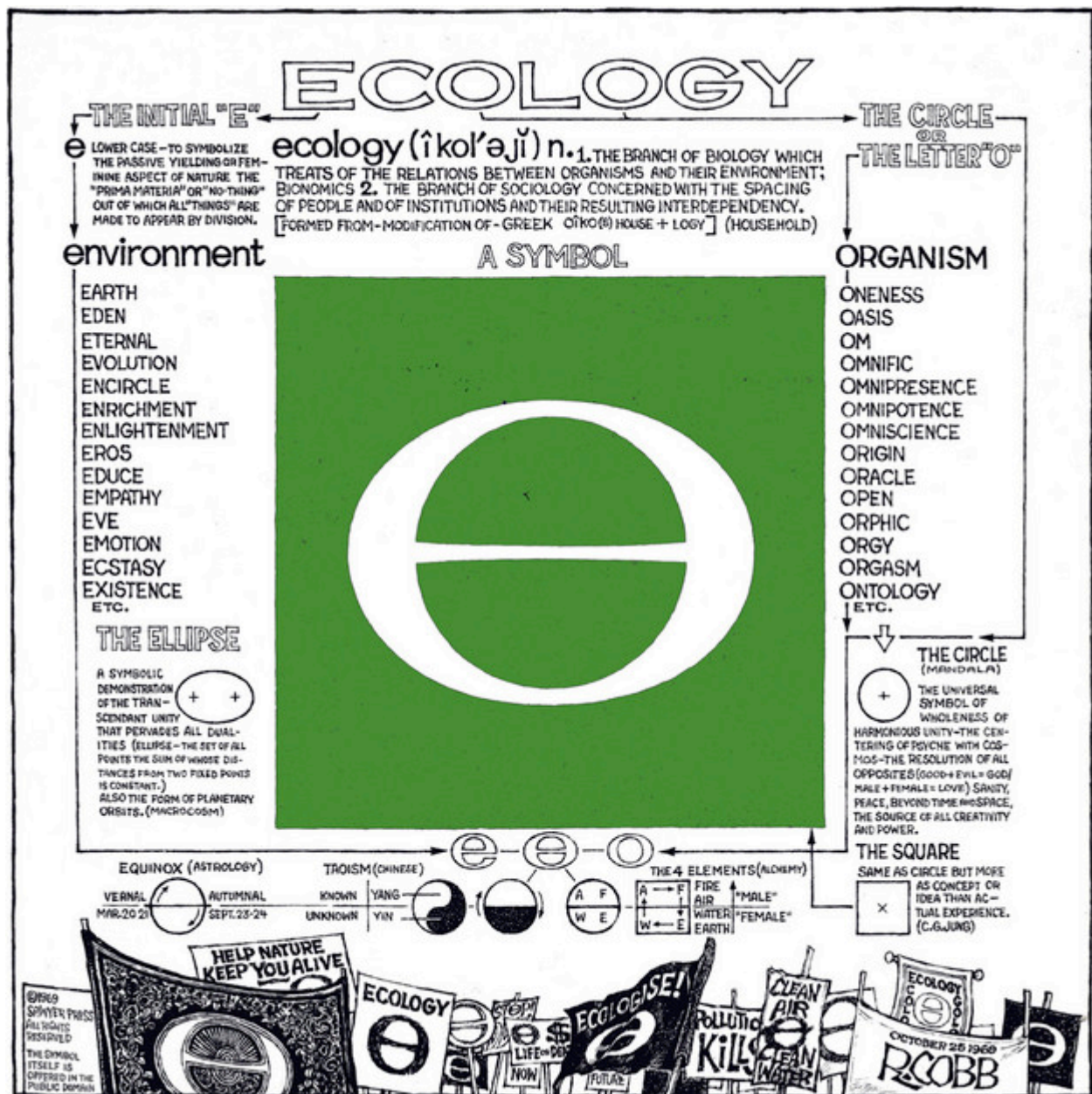
“Therefore know, prajna paramita is the greatest dharani, the brightest dharani, the highest dharani, the incomparable dharani. It completely clears all suffering. This is the truth, not a lie.

“So set forth the prajna paramita dharani. Set forth this dharani and say:

*“Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha.”**

*(*Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone completely beyond! Enlightened Mind, All Hail!)*

IMAGE FOR CONTEMPLATION:



Artist Ron Cobb's "Ecology Symbol" (later adopted for Earth Day) as it first appeared in the *L.A. Free Press*, 1969. (Notice that Cobb attributes the evolution of his emblem in part to the yearly cycle of solstice and equinox as embodied in the Ying-Yang symbol.)



“Past, present and future, all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas rely on prajna paramita (the Mother of Buddhas) and therefore reach the most supreme enlightenment.”

Ben Visbeek’s photo of Buddhas in the *bhumisparsha* (or “earth touching”) mudra, located on the grounds of Wat Phra Chao Phya-thai

TROUBLESHOOTING: If in the second week of practice you have not yet awakened to the dark during the night, you may consider taking a nap during the day, if possible, or immediately before dinner. This will alter the rhythm of your sleep, making it more likely that you can fall into step with the more ancient bi-modal rhythm of sleep.