

Jeanne Corrigan

*Closer Than We Think: Gentle Reflections on Death*

Week Four: “Death Reflection Supporting Response to the Climate Disruption”

October 22, 2022



Friends, we’ve explored together how mindfulness of death can support ourselves and our friends and community. In this part of the talk, I’d like to explore how it can also support our beloved earth. One of the surprises that has come for me from reflecting on death and feeling the decrease in fear around it is that in other areas of my life where I also felt a lot of fear, I’ve also had more capacity to meet those issues, areas, and experiences. One of those areas is the reality of climate disruption, which may be an area of fearfulness or overwhelm for many of us.

Right now, as we’re beginning this, again, settle into the refuge of the body, feet on the ground, on the earth, the weight of the body in the chair, and the sensations that help us be here now.

The first thing I’d like to say is that if you feel any kind of despair or overwhelm or helplessness, you’re not alone. This is the first practice that we really need to lean into: the collectiveness of the sangha.

Thich Nhat Hanh, who was a global figure in climate work, said that his greatest fear was giving into despair. We’re not alone in this human feeling. One thing that has helped me with despair and overwhelm is to recognize in myself that they are often conditioned by a sense or perception that it’s up to me to fix something, to fix the crisis that we’re in. When I have that expectation of fixing, then overwhelm and despair can soon follow because it feels like I can’t fix it. Venerable Analayo’s words are very helpful at this moment. He says, “Our job is not to fix the earth or fix the situation. Our job is to embody that which would heal the world.” When I feel into that, embodying that which would heal the world, that is doable. My heart rushes toward that.

These words and guidance were echoed for me by a friend who said that he received a teaching from a South American elder named Tilak. This elder said that the earth does not need our protection; the earth needs our love. Again, when I say that, my heart rushes forward. This I can do.

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When we feel the distress, the overwhelm, the despair, we can recognize that as an indication of the hugeness of our love for the earth. The practice that I am inviting is to channel that distress toward action rather than toward despair, to channel our love toward action rather than into overwhelm, and to do it in a sangha, to do it together, to embody that which would heal the world, to offer the world our love, and to let love lead us into action. If we can bring the groundedness in and let our love lead us, then we're ready to move to action. Then we can connect with the sangha and with people like Paul Hawken, for example, who has so many ideas about how we can move together to address the crisis that we're in, letting love lead us as a community.

I'd like to close this part of the talk with a prayer from Stan Rushworth. Stan is an elder of Cherokee descent, a member of the Chiricahua Apache Nation, and a professor of Native American studies. He offers this prayer for the earth. You can find this on the internet, and to hear him say it is very powerful. But I really wish for his words to be here with us now.

“Prayer for the Earth: An Indigenous Response to These Times”

Let us just see it simply. Enough to drink in spring's radiance, the yellow scotch bloom against the green fields. Allow our eyes to reach into the morning like fingers into wet grass or tears falling in April's rain. We've been too long away, and the need is huge, our desire unsteady in this time. Let the invisible wanting burst to the surface of our skin, where we may know this world who holds us so dearly even in the middle of our blindness and in the beginnings of our awakening. Let us lie face down in her beauty, feeding her with our gratitude. She is waiting.

Friends, to close our time together, I want to bring in the words of the Buddha from the *Maranasati Sutta*, or the Mindfulness of Death Sutta, where he says, “Mindfulness of death,

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when pursued and developed, brings great fruit and great benefit.” In my experience, it brings great benefit for ourselves, for others in our close community, and for the earth. It’s kind of a mystery to me that such love and care can grow out of this contemplation. It feels to me like the words I’ve offered you have all been words of love, and I hope they’ve been received that way, words of love and care springing from this contemplation.

I want to close with another blessing, a blessing from John O’Donohue, and then we’ll have a couple of moments of silence. “May the nourishment of the earth be yours. May the clarity of light be yours. May the fluency of the ocean be ours. May the protection of the ancestors be yours. And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you an invisible cloak to mind your life.”

Thank you, friends, for our time together.