



Environmentally Sustainable

By Susette Horspool

What would it take to create a world that is environmentally sustainable?

Forty-five years ago, when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Botswana, I lived in an area surrounded by wildlife. It was a large village called Maun, through which ran the Okavango River with hippos, crocodiles, and the bilharzia snail. I had two buddies who worked for a United Nations project researching what the likely outcome would be, if the government were to dredge part of the Okavango Swamps for agriculture. One of my buddies was a field biologist, the other a photographer. We used to take a land rover and field tent out into the bush on weekends to photograph Botswana's abundant wildlife. We had many wonderful experiences

After returning to the States, I got a job with the US Forest Service on a remote district in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. One day my ranger took me on a 2 1/2 hour tour of the hundreds of thousands of acres he managed. I was silently appalled to see that there was hardly any wildlife. They'd been driven away over the years by the noise of logging machines, road construction, and by the many logged clear cuts. The contrast with Botswana taught me a huge lesson. And I committed, then, to doing whatever I could to help the earth thrive.

The earth used to be able to keep herself healthy, but humans have broken a lot of the systems she created for that. We've blocked the refilling of her groundwater storage, we've dug out her minerals, chopped down her forests, and polluted her waters with our discards. We're killing her animals and ocean life, each of which has a role to play in keeping her balanced and healthy. And we're doing it all in the name of building a rich and powerful international economy for humans.

That needs to change. If we don't start putting the health of the earth first in all of our collective, major decision-making, we'll be altering it so much that humans won't be able to survive here anymore.

You and I, as producers and consumers, have a lot more power than we realize. The government, the industrial sector, private business, and the media all depend on us to do their work, utilize their services, and buy their products. That dependency gives each of us influence over how our country functions.

Because I want my influence to be a positive one, I've developed a lifestyle that's as earth friendly, functional, and motivating as I can make it. Here are some examples:

- In my private life, I've given up my car to use other methods of transportation. This has made me better organized, has improved my health, and has generated friendships that might not otherwise be. I keep track of the water and energy I use, so I don't waste them. I recycle. I give up old clothes to thrift shops and also *shop* at thrift shops. I eat organic and local foods. A lot of what I need, I make.

- To influence the business sector, I buy only products I really need, and I'm willing to pay more for products with lifetime warranties. When I buy products from Amazon, I rate them to let others know which brands are good. When I'm angry about a product or business practice I write the company to inform them. For example, a long time ago I didn't like the way I was treated at a grocery store. I wrote a letter, they apologized, and brought over a big basket of fruit. With the Lakota Access Pipeline protests last year, I wrote a letter to Bank of America's Board of Directors asking them to stop financing the project, giving them stats on the lowering costs and rising use of renewables, and declaring that they were wasting their money by financing a declining fossil fuels industry.
- On the government side, I believe that good governance is based on the needs and will of the people, so I find ways to let them know what my will is. I network with local activists and attend city council meetings. I write to state and federal representatives with key research and experience they might not have access to. I sometimes send them articles I've written. I sign petitions and rephrase them in my own words. Before voting, I look up the background *and* integrity of all the candidates running.

All of these practices anybody could adopt. I'm sure many of you are doing similar things, but there's always more that's possible. In this church, we have set up a Net Zero program—for the church itself, and also to help us discover how we can reshape our lives to contribute to the healthy, balanced, beautiful, earth-centered world we want to live in.

By doing our part, we add strength to those organizations, businesses, and governments that are changing the way they relate to the earth too. Working together, we humans *can* become truly good caretakers of the earth.

Socially Just

By Rachel Macias Ramirez

What would it take to create a world that is Socially Just?

Great question!

When I reflected on that question, other questions came to mind such as; why do we behave in socially unjust ways? Why do we continuously allow systems and structures that are socially unjust? What can I do? What can we do to feel, think and behave differently, to implement the changes we so desperately need?

As children we are usually taught some form of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” An often quoted paraphrase of Jesus’ words. Or one of my favorites as stated by Hillel a great Jewish sage of the 1st century who stated to a questioning student, “What is hateful to thee, do not do unto thy fellow man: this is the whole of the Law, the rest is mere commentary. Now go study!”

Most faith traditions and cultures offer the same moral code or spiritual law, yet we humans clearly have a hard time putting it into practice. If the rest is commentary, what gets in the way of treating someone else as you would like to be treated? Why is injustice so prevalent? Is it fear, hatred, jealousy, greed, arrogance, apathy... fill in the blank. Or could it be that we do not know how to be kind and loving to ourselves therefore, we find it difficult to treat others well.

If you were fortunate to grow up in a loving family, chances are you experienced what it is to be loved, to receive that love and in turn to give love. In that process, are you also taught to love yourself or does love become something that is bestowed upon you and that you bestow upon others. We are not often explicitly taught that it is important to treat yourself well, to think kind thoughts, to have compassion, to give praise for a job well done, to be aware of your needs and tend to them. I am not talking about egotism or narcissism but truly embodying what it is to love - you cannot leave yourself out of the equation or you will become depleted, empty and resentful. If I have critical, demanding, judgmental thoughts about myself, how does that translate to how I treat others?

We have inner conversations much of the day whether we are aware of them or not. For example, what do you say to yourself when you look in the mirror in the morning? Or when you sit down to a meal? When you go shopping for new clothes or swimwear? What do you say to yourself throughout your workday?

Some may argue this is a selfish point of view, we should always think of others before ourselves, but I believe the opposite to be true. To love or be proud of oneself does not mean to ostracize, belittle, or demean another. The more love I have available inside of me, the more love I have to share. I like to think of it as emotional oxygen. You know how parents are instructed on an airplane, if the oxygen masks are released, put yours on first and then assist your children. You must help yourself first, if you are going to be able to continue to help others.

I don't know about you but when i am faced with the realities of the various forms of injustice in the world, I feel overwhelmed! I can feel heartbroken, afraid, angry, helpless... I have had to find ways to bring myself to that place compassion, love and hope, over and over again. Remembering I am one person, I can choose my reactions and actions. I can effect change one step at a time. I can pick my cause, find my people, and work steadily toward a goal.

As the Dalai Lama says: "A positive future can never emerge from the mind of anger and despair."

So, what would it take to create a world that is socially just? It begins with the Individual. Imagine you are pebble dropped into a pond, creating ever extending ripples. Each ripple represents your sphere of influence. You the Individual, next ripple - touching the lives of Family and Friends, next ripple - joining in Community projects , next ripple- participating in holding Institutions accountable, and next ripple which connects to others' ripples - joining others in masses to effect change in systems and structures.

I found this little gem in the Game Changer intensive and I'll leave this with you:

"To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order, to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order, to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life, and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right." Confucius

Spiritually Fulfilling

By Rev. Lissa Gundlach

David Buckel was an LGBT rights lawyer famous for his work representing the family of transgender hate crime victim Brandon Teena and for the *Varnum v. Brien* case which legalized same sex marriage in Iowa. He was also a passionate environmental activist who dedicated his life outside of work to environmental sustainability. He managed the largest composting effort in the country at the Red Hook Community farm in Brooklyn.

According to the Red Hook farm tribute to Buckel:

David was a master composter and a master at coordinating volunteers. He managed up to 2,000 volunteers a year who helped process more than 150 tons of compostable material by hand. With a focus on low-income communities, he developed the Red Hook site into one of the best run and most successful urban composting sites in the US and all without fossil fuel machines, something of which he was particularly proud. (He created a model for under-resourced neighborhoods to keep their organic produce for their own benefit, greening where they live with more healthy food, beauty, and environmental stewardship.)

From the outside looking in, David was in the prime of life, married and successful, connected to a strong local and national community, a leader among his fellow activists. On early Saturday morning, David retreated into the familiar green banks of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and lit himself on fire, ending his accomplished and meaningful life. He left behind the following note.

Pollution ravages our planet, oozing inhabatability via air, soil, water and weather. Our present grows more desperate, our future needs more than what we've been doing. My early death by fossil fuel reflects what we are doing to ourselves. A lifetime of service may best be preserved by giving a life ... Honorable purpose in life invites honorable purchase in death. I hope it is an honorable death that might serve others.

In many ways, David Buckel was the picture of walking the walk of living an environmentally sustainable, socially just life. Buckel's untimely death is a puzzling moral question for us to ponder. How could a person so dedicated to his work, someone not only passionate about his causes but effective in advancing them choose to end his life in such a violent and painful way? What is the meaning of his death?

People close to Buckel have warned that his death was not meant to "lionize" the very real issue of suicide, but to point back to the tradition of Buddhist self-immolation, a spiritual reaction to unbearable circumstances used as a tool of political protest. (In 1963, an unforgettable photograph of a Vietnamese monk meditating noiselessly as his body was consumed by flames caught the attention of the world.)

Most recently, Tibetan Buddhists have used self-immolation in protest of the increasingly oppressive Chinese occupation of Tibet. Since 2009, 148 monks have set fire to themselves, calling their deaths a ritual self-sacrifice. Their hope with their deaths is to invoke the compassion and anger to motivate ordinary people to join in protest, and to put pressure on the Chinese government to enact more humane policies and practices towards the Tibetan people. (Believing they had no greater power than their lives to give to the cause, only their own deaths could communicate the depth of suffering experienced by the Tibetan people at the hands of the Chinese authorities.)

For Buckel, I suspect that having given his life to his activism, he was left feeling frustrated and disheartened that his efforts had not made sufficient headway in influencing others to change their habits. I imagine his deep pain and regret that even his loudest calls did not reach the highest halls of power determined to pillage our land and seas and drive us into more wars to feed our fossil fuel addiction. And I imagine him feeling the deep suffering of the world, seeing the ongoing destruction of the earth. I can even imagine how he would have the thought, as the Tibetan monks, that his own death would be the only way to make that suffering visible.

The Buddhist response to suffering is compassion- an ever renewing movement of the heart which draws us to “feel with” others. This is the essence of our 7th principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. When we have compassion for the suffering we have caused the earth, we can have compassion for how it manifests in the suffering of people- people starving in draught from lack of rain in Malawi, people losing their homes to floods in Houston, and yes, the everyday suffering of people like David Buckel struggling, like us, to square their optimism and commitment to action with the despairing realities of climate change and the current administration’s antagonism, corporate alliances and denial.

Buckel’s death sets before us a spiritual problem of great magnitude: How do we live with ourselves knowing the depth of damage we have done to our planet? How can we bring forth a presence on the planet that is environmentally sustainable, socially just, and ultimately spiritually fulfilling? We are not monks, but ordinary people, concerned with the wellbeing of the planet, and seeking steady and effective ways to address the enormity of the problems we face. Buckel’s choice was not to live, but to turn his rage and hopelessness about the world into what he believed was a noble sacrifice.

The choice before us is to not to sacrifice our lives but to choose to live sustainably. This includes maintaining the sustainability of our activism. We must cultivate our own personal ecology with a steady diet of hope, nourished by beauty, motivated by the healing power of community and the gratifying power of action. Key to our spiritual fulfillment is a deep practice of compassion which embraces both our human limitations and our power. A compassion which holds our hearts open wide to embrace the challenges of our planet’s predicament, and complexity of our modern lives. A compassion for the web of life whose threads weave a Buddhist monk in Tibet and an activist in Brooklyn together with our congregation in Pasadena this morning.

Like planet Earth, let compassion be the spiritual home we share, connecting us with all beings.

May it be so, and amen