

Living Deeply: The Fate of the Earth

—*Robert Thurman, Ph.D.*

As you savor the thoughtful messages in *Living Deeply*, consider this simple meditation. You are in a space capsule with Edgar Mitchell, the Apollo 14 astronaut. You're there in the vastness of outer space. You see all the stars shining majestically, unobscured by lights from any cities. You look down and see something that looks like a round, opalescent, glistening, shining jewel. You can see the blue of the oceans, the white of the clouds, the brown streaks of the deserts, the gray mountaintops, and the green of the jungles and forests. And of course, you're with Edgar, so you're hoping you're going to get back safely to this jewel called Earth.

You're having a vision of the unity of life on this planet. You may also be aware simultaneously that there are infinite numbers of such jewels in

the universe. But this is yours—your home. It is also the home of six billion other human beings and many trillions of other life forms. As you look, you feel a wonderful sense of oneness and togetherness with all of those beings living on this thin, delicate film on the surface of molten rock under a thin layer of air—like the fuzz on a peach.

As you look down at this jewel, you have a little tinge of sorrow about the foolish people who are destroying the basis of life on this planet. It doesn't frighten you too much, though, for you realize that there must be some degree of wisdom, generosity, love, and compassion to match the beauty of Mother Earth, Mother Gaia.

From this perspective of deep space, you may then do what the Tibetans call *offering the mandala*. By *mandala* they mean the whole of the protected zone wherein life, mind, and spirit can thrive. You notice that there is an element in you that is possessive about this planet. In a way, even your own mind has a little element of what those foolish people who try to conquer and exploit life have in them. You may become aware that sometimes you, too, feel like you own the place. And yet you realize, from that capsule in deep space, that no one owns it. You can then imagine that you pick up the entire planet very gently in your hands—and you give it away. If you believe in angels, you give it to them. If you believe in deities, you give it to them. If you don't believe in all of that, you just give it to the enlightened beings. You give it away to wisdom. You detach yourself from a sense of ownership, and as you do this, you realize that you are a guest. And you realize that this ultimate generosity is the basis of true happiness.

This subtle shift in awareness is what *Living Deeply* is all about. By transforming our consciousness, we participate in the transformation of the world. Each of us has the capacity to shift from a dominator worldview to one in which we realize life is a precious gift; we understand what a privilege it is to be alive. Through hours of research and deep inquiry with masters from many world traditions, and surveys with everyday folks like you and me, Marilyn Schlitz, Cassandra Vieten, and Tina Amorok offer us a map to an expanded model of reality. As these noetic scientists explore the interface of Western science and Eastern “inner science,” they offer insights essential to meeting the challenges of a twenty-first century planet

that out-of-control humans are pushing toward destruction. Through their findings based on a decade of serious research, heard through the voices of many wisdom teachers, the authors help us recognize more fully that our life is totally interwoven with every other person and with all other species on our beloved planet.

This book reveals that a sense of unity and connection is part of most world traditions. It certainly is very much a part of Buddhist philosophy, which I describe as “engaged realism.” Buddha’s discovery, so long ago, was that suffering comes out of ignorance of the true nature of reality, and from this ignorance arises an attachment to the control and domination over the earth and the life that inhabits it. While we may be drawn to worldly delights, the Buddha observed that people’s core needs are more basic, dealing with the meaning of life, sickness, old age, death, and suffering.

Buddha was not a religious prophet, but he was not an atheist either. He actually was said to have met the Hindu god Brahma during his transformative experience. In a state of meditation, he traveled with his subtle body-mind into the heavens. He came into the throne room, and Brahma was there with all the other little godlings. And Buddha said, “Oh great Brahma, I hear you are the world creator. Since you created it, you must know how it works. I am determined to discover how the world works, so please tell me.” At first dismissive of Buddha, Brahma later called to him on his way out of heaven. “I can’t let you leave without giving you a proper answer,” he said. “You see, the thing is, I didn’t really create it, and therefore I don’t know how it works. I’m just the biggest shot around here. But these godlings think I did create it and they think I know how it works and they feel secure in my protection. If I had said to you in front of them ‘I don’t know what’s going on,’ they would have had an identity crisis, and we’re a little short of shrinks here in heaven. But you’re going to be a Buddha in a future life, and you will know how it works and in that time you have to do two things. One, come and tell me. I’m a quick study; I am “God,” after all. And two, tell the human beings that when things go terribly wrong for them—when their children die, they have a terrible accident, there’s a disaster or a catastrophe—tell them it’s not my fault. I’m not in total control. I do my best for them. But it’s

all our mutual karma. It's our entire mutual collective situation that draws these difficulties down upon us."

So Buddha did meet God, but he didn't get a "message from God" like the ones that lead many religious founders to rush out and say "Believe in this or that or the other and then we'll save you from suffering." Buddha did not say that to people. In fact, he did not say that believing in anything would save you. He said, "Eureka! There's a way you can be saved from suffering, but that way is that you have to understand yourself and you have to understand your reality."

Now just the fact that he had a vision of life doesn't prove he was right. Even though hundreds of millions of people over the millennia have thought he was right, he may have been wrong. So the Buddha founded an educational movement rather than a religion. His vision was to bring out our own wisdom rather than to assert the truth. He taught in dialogic form, like Socrates and Confucius. He talked with people, questioning them, getting them to think critically, helping them to see through their own delusions, and encouraging them to come up with a deeper insight into the nature of things.

In that sense, Buddha was a scientist—a noetic scientist. He understood that the most important factor in the quality of life for a human being is how the person's mind is managed. From this perspective, transforming our consciousness is the most important work we can ever do. And today, as I travel with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, he always tells us that we should not think that the solution is to all become Buddhists, but rather that we should explore for ourselves ways of training and educating the mind, developing the emotions, becoming aware of ourselves, managing our negative habits, and detoxifying ourselves from our mental toxins.

This can be done, he tells us, if you are a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim or a Hindu or a secular humanist or something else. The goal is to free our minds from suffering by understanding who we really are. What the Buddha discovered is that the nature of reality is bliss. Of course, he didn't say we have to believe that, but he encouraged us to investigate for ourselves, and he reported that this is what he himself discovered. Not from a place of fanatic, fundamentalist spirituality, but from a place grounded in a deep

respect for the mystery of life and a consciousness that sees the connections rather than the appearance of separation.

What is needed today is an expansion of the noetic sciences—the kind of sciences that allow us to understand our inner being. As we explore the nature of consciousness, we can see that the root cause of the destruction of this planet is the toxins of our mind, especially delusion, hatred, and greed. Hatred produces war, greed produces industrial overproduction and pollution, and delusion makes us want to do all of that but keeps us miserable anyway. Noetic sciences should be a national and even international priority, allowing each of us to be the scientist of our own experience, our own way of knowing and being in the world.

As we turn our attention inward, we begin to discover, just as the many people interviewed for this book express so elegantly, that we are not the center of the universe and that we do not control the nature of reality. Contrary to what we hear from the materialist domains of science, which emphasize reductionism and an objective detachment from the world outside ourselves, we are not really separate from each other or from the world in which we live. Through a process of consciousness transformation, whether sudden or gradual, you can become more and more aware of the ways in which you are interconnected with all other beings. When you realize this, the struggle is over. The joy of others becomes your joy. You become compassionate about the suffering of others because it's your suffering. Realizing your interconnectedness is like going into a cold stream on a warm summer day. You put that toe in and you say, "Oh, I didn't need to come swimming here. I think I'll go back. I'll go back into my air conditioning. I don't need to jump in there. I might have a heart attack!" But then you jump in anyway, and it changes your whole day, your whole life, and you love it. As each of us jumps into this stream, we are contributing to the healing of ourselves, our fellow humans, and all the living beings that make up this precious planet we call home. As a kind British lady I know once said, "Think globally. Act joyfully." This is indeed the art and science of living deeply.

Enjoy this book, so wisely and lovingly put together by its authors, which provides you with an inspiring vision of what you will find, to your lasting

delight, when you use your chosen method to take a really good look into your mind, your world, and your interconnectedness with all life. It is my pleasure and privilege to congratulate the authors for their accomplishment, and to welcome you to the real world to which this book is an open door.

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