

## **16 Core Dharma Principles Important To Address Climate Change and How Dharma Practitioners Can Engage**

By The Dharma Teachers International Collaborative on Climate Change (10-21-13)

The following dharma principles directly apply to the issue of climate disruption:

1. *Reverence for life*: From this point forward climate disruption is the overriding context for all life on earth, including humans. What we humans do will determine what life survives and thrives and in what form and locations.
2. *Happiness stems from helping others*: Our greatest personal happiness comes when we give of ourselves and help others. For example, many people instinctually help our neighbors after a natural disaster, which indicates that altruism and the desire to help others is built into our genes. We must grow and apply this to the marginalized among us that are at least initially hit hardest by climate disruption. This is the very opposite of the greed and self-centeredness that dominates today.
3. *We suffer when we cling*: The very nature of happiness is dependent on our capacity to give up our attachments and help others. This same principle must now be elevated and applied to public policies of all types.
4. *The ethical imperative*: All beings matter. We should act in ways that are beneficial for both self and others, acting out of a commitment to altruism and compassion for others.
5. *Interconnection and interdependence*: We must dissolve objectification of other people and nature and overcome the belief in a separate self that leads us to through a sense of kinship. Even as we let go of the delusion of an individual self that is separate from other people, we must let go of the delusion that humanity is separate from the rest of the biosphere. Our interdependence with the earth means that we cannot pursue our own well-being at the cost of its well-being. When the earth's ecosystems become sick, so do our bodies and our societies.
6. *Renunciation, simplicity*: To resolve climate disruption we must be willing to renounce attachments to things to contribute to the problem and live more simply.
7. *The relationship between the First and Second Noble Truth and capacity to learn to work with difficult states*: Understanding the suffering we have created symbolized by climate disruption and how it came about and that we can learn not to identify with it and instead work through distressing states such as fear, despair, etc.
8. *Opening to suffering as a vehicle for awakening*: The suffering caused by climate disruption provides an unprecedented opportunity for humans to learn from our individual and collective mistakes and manifest a great awakening. It is a special opportunity like never before. We can find ways to be happy—we can “tend and befriend” rather than fight (among ourselves), flee, or freeze. We can acknowledge that

this is the way things are now, open to the suffering rather than becoming attached, and think and act in new ways

9. *The interconnectedness of inner and outer, the individual and the collective* (or institutional): Climate disruption provides an unprecedented opportunity to understand the roots of the problem—which relate to the ways our minds work and how those patterns become embedded in collective and collective/ institutional practices and policies. This awareness can open the door to new ways of thinking and responding that will eventually produce different institutional practices and policies.
10. *Connection to diversity and justice issues.* The dharma principles and narratives must also apply to issues of diversity and social inclusion and justice. The beliefs in separateness etc that has produced the climate crisis also leads to social inequity and exclusion. People of color and other marginalized groups must be included.
11. *Buddhism as a social change agent:* The principles of Buddhism help us engage with life, not remove ourselves from it. The Buddha was actively engaged with his social and cultural contexts and for Buddhism to have relevance today it must help people understand how to engage in today's political and social contexts.
12. *Adhitthana or determination:* We are called to develop resolve, determination, and heroic effort now. We must have the courage to realize that we are being called to engage in this issue and that living the dharma will see us through the hard times.
13. *Remembering this precious human birth is an opportunity:* We must always remember that it is a rare and precious thing to be born as a human and we have been given a rare opportunity to act as stewards because humans are not only the source of destruction—we are also the source of great goodness.
14. *Love is the greatest motivator:* Our deepest and most powerful action comes out of love: of this earth, of each other. The more people can connect with and feel love for the Earth, the greater the likelihood that their hearts will be moved to help prevent harm. Children should therefore be a top priority. Need to help people realize what they love about life and what will be lost as climate disruption increases.
15. *The Sangha—and other forms of social support--are essential:* The reality of climate disruption is a profound shock to many people and the only way to minimize or prevent fight, flight, freeze responses is to be supported by and work with others so people will not feel alone, can overcome despair, and develop solutions together. We need to go through this journey together, sharing our difficult reactions and positive experiences in groups and communities.
16. *The Bodhisattva:* The figure of the Bodhisattva, which is a unifying image of someone who is dedicated to cultivating the inner depths and to helping others, is an inspiring figure for our times.