

Some thoughts to share

This time is momentous, truly. We practice with the quite-literal potential for illness and death in our homes and families. And more, this practice encompasses not only our home places but the entire planet. Amazingly: essentially the whole world has simply stopped functioning in all but what-we-call essential ways. Simultaneously, so-many-beings are in pause, and we find ourselves paying attention together to the emerging expression of coronavirus. How can we correctly discern what is happening, what is needed now in this time of pause? What can we offer?

The language of dharma is potent, pointing to elements and dimensions and glimpses of truth, a poetical view that we catch glimpses of in moments of clarity. We value this language as practitioners, we study it and hold it as a source of guidance. This language correctly points out aspects of the digits of that finger that is pointing toward the moon. But language is multiple, and especially so for states of mind. And it is true that many forms of language are pointing toward the truth, some not-so-skillfully as others, but for me the language of ecology seems to align with dharma in many ways. Ecology pays attention to physical reality across a range of scale, from galaxies to micro-universes. Ecology understands that physical reality is described by the system of relationships among all. The study of relationships, this is dharma science.

One essential element of the present view: coronavirus practice is fiercely physical: practicing the ways and means of living and dying. Serious business. The physical dimension calls out for tending.

A corollary: as we tend, what comes forward is the reality of the planet, vast collective level of being. What happens here is very relevant to what happens there, and so we act to benefit others as best we can. The physical dimension has become our teacher: coronavirus practice. Our choices determine so much. This is basic ecology in motion.

There is so much we don't understand. How can the study of ecology help?

One basic point of view for students of ecological science is the one that includes perception of systems. Scale is a term that describes the units-of-measure for the particular perspective, the specific elements and elemental relationships of interest. The scale of galaxies is distinct from the scale of particle physics, these elements are characteristic of specific and distinct levels of perspective. And more: there is function of the system that only becomes detectable at yet more vast scale, and this function depends on the elements and inter-relationships within the smaller scale. And finally: these two levels of scale are not separate, we know that now. Life depends on acknowledgement of the overlap, we avoid this at our peril.

What is the dharma of this ecology? Thinking about the whole-planet system that provides the playing ground for the virus, we recognize we are a critical element of that system. There is much that can be said, which I will not say, about our activities and their consequences in the planetary system. Suffice it to say we are collectively a critical element, though only one of myriad elements. We also recognize that relationships that connect us to others are precious in some cases and unavoidable in all others. We have to acknowledge them, to honor them.

This lesson may seem ordinary but it is profound. Also it is inescapable. The planet contains us. Another way to say it: we are not separate from earth. This is perhaps the most critical dharma lesson of coronavirus practice that basic ecology demonstrates. The question that remains: If this is true, how then do we live? I propose that ecology teaches that how we

respond to this question will determine much about the system-level function that is forming and emerging in this moment at the next-up level of scale, or the next-up level of being. This form is literally coming into being via the choices we are making. This birth is currently underway and labor is difficult. The transition zone is at hand, considered the most challenging period. Many contradictory impulses are rising and falling, there are many reasons to lose hope. And yet, from the dharma perspective, the essential focus is beginning to cohere. We take care of one another. This is the necessary step for this moment.

May we all be at ease.