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Mindfulness, empathy, contentment and communication; five buddhist perspectives and five solutions to five UNSDGs

Gunaketu Bjørn Kjønstad

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Introduction

We are one – living different perspectives on seeing reality

Religions contribute both to sustainable and to unsustainable ways of living. This is one of the conclusions I drew from an Interreligious climate pilgrimage I helped organize and participated in together with the Annette Dreyer, Hanna Barth Hake and Harween Kaur in 2018, and which was the starting point for this article.

The purpose of the article is to explore how one religion can draw on its perspectives and practices to encourage sustainable ways of living, as part of a dialog with other religions with the same mission. A starting point is to reduce intra- and interreligious fighting or competitiveness that draws attention away from more pressing questions of how to live sustainably on this planet. The Dalai Lama often claims that the major religions are roughly 80% the same and 20% different. That is a useful theory, where theory is understood as a claim intended to explain something (Lewin, 1951).

Based on the 80% we can join forces and pursue sustainable living, like we did on the interreligious climate pilgrimage. Inspired by long term activist and trainer of activists from all kinds of faiths and non-faiths Guhyapati (2014) uses "sustainable living" to refer to three levels: 1) personally, so we can live healthy autonomous lives unfolding our potential; 2) relationally, so we want to collaborate in the future; 3) ecologically, so we sustain the environment in which we can live and blossom. These are all intertwined and mutually interdependent. The 20% are for the minority of serious devotees of any faith. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this perspective is to accept that one cannot convert the whole world to one's faith and missionary activities should not conflict or jeopardize the 17 United Nation Sustainability Development Goals (SDG).

The interreligious climate pilgrimage

We were 22 people from six different faiths who walked together for three days staying overnight in simple lodgings. We had a daily program of some shared practices and exercise in the morning, shared breakfast when we also packed our lunches, walking in silence whilst reflecting on a question. Reflecting collectively in breaks and whilst walking, enjoying a simple dinner and then engaging in some program in the evening before going to bed. Whilst walking we were reflecting on the following questions: Why are you coming on this interreligious climate pilgrimage? How can your faith contribute in climate challenges, theoretically or practically? What do you bring with you from this journey to contribute to change in the future? This article is my response as a Buddhist academic activist to the second and third question.

[1] Gunaketu Bjørn Kjønstad, Oslo Buddhistsenter (Oslo Buddhist Centre - Triratna Norway)

Buddhist contributions

I want to start with a story of how I joined a Buddhist community. I had started a PhD in Business Ethics in Manchester, UK and wanted to explore how different religious groups lived out their values and to see if this empowered them to live happier or more meaningful lives. I had some connection with a Buddhist group now called Triratna and knew they had a business called Windhorse Trading. They employed some 200 people importing giftware to the UK for sales. I spent a couple of weeks there as a pilot study to focus my research. Later that year, my supervisor Hugh Willmott and I presented our findings at the Business Ethics conference in Paris 1993. When disputes emerged, we were told to cool down and not take the topic so seriously. I was abashed: How can one not take ethics seriously? Disillusioned with academia and inspired by the Buddhist practitioners I wrote up my findings as a Master thesis and 'went native' by starting to work with the Buddhists (Kjonstad & Willmott, 1995).

The first lesson the story brings out is the importance of living our message. We need to walk our talk (G. Kjønstad, 2006). Buddhist theories or practice are useless if not practiced. This was brought out in Windhorse Trading in the way they practiced both individually, relationally and collectively in relation to both the personal, social and ecological (Howes, 1993).

The most comprehensive Buddhist concept to explain our phenomenological world is that of interbeing (Lim, 2019) or conditioned co-production (Sangharakshita, 2003). It states the holistic perspective that all phenomena influence each other directly or indirectly. It is a relevant background theory but usually too general to be of much practical use. Instead I will focus on basic ethical guidelines that are as relevant for the individual and their relations as for institutions (Sangharakshita, 1984/1989).
These guidelines come under headlines of:

- Mindfulness
- Love
- Generosity – here talked of as a reformulation of SDG8 to "Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all"
- Contentment
- Communication

Mindfulness 3.0 for sustainable cities and communities: SDG 11

Mindfulness has been one of the hot points of focused research the last decades showing significant benefits in a variety of situations from stress-reduction to wellbeing (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012; Ericson, Kjønstad & Barstad, 2014; Salvesen & Wästlund, 2017). Three phases in the popularisation of mindfulness can be identified, showing a deepening understanding of the practice. This depth of practice is part and parcel of the Buddhist practice of mindfulness.

Mindfulness 1.0 with Jon Kabbat-Zinn

Jon Kabat Zinn and his team (1990) demonstrated how helpful mindfulness can be in dealing with chronic pain and stress in a variety of ways (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012). The focus was on cultivating a friendly acceptance of one's experience in the moment. It implied not getting into criticism for being in pain, nor adding painful imagined experiences from the

past or future to the present experience. It was recognized that such training takes time to achieve, and when engaged with had good results (Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tyssen, Hanley & Garland, 2018).

Mindfulness 2.0 including empathy

Over the years one saw the need to place more focus on emotions in mindfulness training to really achieve the friendly acceptance of potentially painful and chronic or sustained pain, physical and/or mental (Raphael-Grimm & Zuccarini, 2015). Exploring the problem of compassion fatigue Thomas and Otis (2010) found that intentional management of internal emotional states is as important for the client as for the practitioner, and recommends skills training in both mindfulness and empathy/compassion.

Mindfulness 3.0 from empathy to altruism

To explore how to counteract compassion- or empathic fatigue Tania Singer and Olga Klimecki introduced training in loving kindness or altruistic care after the training on empathy (Singer & Bolz, 2013). The researchers were able to demonstrate that a week of training in compassion increased prosocial behaviour in a virtual game specially developed to measure the tendency to help others. Fredrickson et al. found that the Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) helped increased mindfulness, purpose in life and social support whilst it helped decrease illness symptoms. In turn, these increments in personal resources predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms (Fredrickson et al., 2017). Thomas and Otis found that LKM can help health professionals prevent compassion fatigue, burnout, and facilitate compassion satisfaction (Thomas & Otis, 2010). Garland, Fredrickson & al has gone further to explore how this embracing of these emotional aspects and other Buddhist features are important in stimulate positive psychological processes and give meaning to life (Garland, Farb, Goldin & Fredrickson, 2015). Carlson on the other hand claims that this has been happening all along yet agrees with the need to develop a language to fit clinical observations and practices (Carlson, 2015). They point towards the importance of learning, adopting, cultivating and maintaining an altruistic *intention* in mindfulness training. This is different from the acting out of doing physical altruistic acts and are both helpful in different ways. In a Tibetan Buddhist context they are called “intention stage” and “fruition stage” (Ricard, 2015).

An effective practice to cultivate this altruistic intention is what is usually called Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) or meditation on loving kindness, also known as “metta bhavana”. This is a practice where you direct your attention towards yourself, a friend, a stranger, an enemy and finally to all living beings whilst cultivating both a kind acceptance of what you feel and think *and* cultivate an altruistic intention towards them. (For an introduction to this practice you can go to https://www.wildmind.org/metta/introduction). When doing research on participants of this meditation Fredrickson & al concludes: “Participants who invested an hour or so each week practicing this form of meditation enhanced a wide range of positive emotions in a wide range of situations, especially when interacting with others. We find these data especially promising. LKM appears to be one positive emotion induction that keeps on giving, long after the identifiable “event” of meditation practice. Positive emotions feel good, and feelings like love, joy, and contentment can be valuable in and of themselves.” (Fredrickson et al., 2017, s. 1060). This is a promising

area for further studies and one that can broaden the understanding and practice of mindfulness further in all fields where general mindfulness has proven helpful.

Insight meditation: Vipassana - Seeing through our illusions

An important aspect of Buddhist meditation is to see through the illusions we create in making sense of life as we experience it. Gestalt psychology drew Westerners attention to this aspect of perception that has been recognized and incorporated in meditation for over 2000 years (Anālayo, 2015; Wagemans et al., 2012). As far as I can tell the insight has been removed from secular mindfulness. This might be because it is seen to belong to the 20% that is different from other religions and therefore more difficult to accept and make use of in the population. After all, Buddhists usually claim that the idea of a God who created the Universe is an illusion to see through. This need not be a reason to avoid all insight practice. It is possible to use the tools of insight meditation to explore one's views about reality in relation to one's experience in a limited way. It could be very useful to explore the illusion that greater material prosperity will bring greater happiness often referred to as The Easterling Paradox (Opfinger, 2016). If we can apply a meditation to see through this illusion it might help us change a pattern of overconsumption and unrealistic expectations to growth. This in turn can help us live more sustainable in cities and communities according to SDG 11.

Love reduces inequalities: SDG 10

Love the marginalized and disadvantaged

The effects of unsustainable ways of living is likely to cause emergencies, traumas and conflicts as people struggle to provide for basic needs or defend old privileges. This is reflected in SDG 10: Support the marginalized and disadvantaged. Initially people need to have their basic needs for food, shelter and safety met. But this is not enough over time. One of the most effective ways to deal with the traumas and conflicts is through supportive acts of loving kindness (Ricard, 2015; Salvesen & Wästlund, 2017; Staemmler, 2011). This is central to all faiths yet needs being brought out again and again.

Love other people with similar values

The marginalized and disadvantaged need our kindness and love but are not the only ones in need of it. An interesting comment on this is from Aldous Huxley, the English writer and philosopher, humanist and pacifist. Both his interests and his travels brought him into all kinds of experiences. Towards the end of his life he said: "People often ask me what the most effective technique is for transforming their life. It is a little embarrassing that after years and years of research and experimentation, I have to say that the best answer is - just be a little kinder." (Guhyapati, 2014, s. 50 minutes inn.) It might seem strange that such a psychonaut should conclude with this, but it is in line with Buddhist practice. Acknowledging that we are all interlinked through conditioned co-production as mentioned above our freedom of choice is severely limited. It is restrained by the conditions we find ourselves in. The most potent condition in affecting our development and change to a more sustainable way of living is other people. If we want to choose to live more sustainably, we should, according to Buddhism, cultivate friendships with other people with similar values.

Love other activists

Activists need to be kind to one another. Guhyapati, who has spent two and a half decades working with radical ecology and Buddhist perspectives and practices points out

that activists all over Europe are struggling with burn-out. He established the Eco-Dharma retreat centre in a beautiful and wild part of the Catalan Pyrenees he and the team around him went to COP conferences, demonstrations and rallies. He is also teaching at the Schumacher college. Now, the Eco-Dharma team works on building resilience. Despite all the bad news of a changing climate and politicians and electorate doing little it is the internal conflicts amongst the activists that drains the most energy. He claims that we need to become kinder with each other and collaborate better.

Love those with power

Those with power and resources also need kindness and love. Jonny Steinberg concludes an article on policing in the post-apartheid South Africa that "the consent of citizens to be policed is a precondition of policing" (Steinberg, 2008). Transferring that insight to sustainable behaviour, people need to consent to be directed towards sustainable solutions. Nudging could be seen as an example of this and is seen as a promising strategy at least in some areas (Kasperbauer, 2017). I believe there is also a need for regulations, and this could parallel the shift to a more sustainable way of living with the prohibition on smoking in public places. (Pinilla, López-Valcárcel & Negrín, 2019). A helpful precondition for both nudging and regulation is probably trust. Trust that the nudging and regulation is in one's interest. The use and application of trust has become the subject of much study of group development, especially since the 1st world war where groups identical in size, training and equipment performed very differently (Frew, 1997). A recent application of this has been Google's inquiry into team development (Duhigg, 2016). They too found that trust was the most important unifying factor to cultivate collaboration. How do we then cultivate trust? Thielmann and Hilbig found that kindness is a prime determinant of trustworthiness. (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2015). This puts an angel on the use for love and kindness in moving towards sustainable living.

Love your enemy

This is for some the most difficult aspect of love and all the more important. Many years ago, I met a young Animals Rights activist who held onto his hatred of hunters to motivate him and steel him for dangerous encounters. A year later I met him again at the festival Buddhafield and he had realised the heavy cost of his strategy on both himself and those around him. The theme is picked up by Otto Scharmer and Eric Peterson who encourages us to listen so deeply that we find common ground also with our enemies or people we don't trust or like (Peterson, 2019).

Love yourself

For others, this is the most difficult aspect of love: To be kind towards ourselves. To the extent we engage with the SDGs we will be painfully aware of our individual and collective shortcomings. We cannot help everyone, even if that is our heartfelt aim. We might also become increasingly aware of our own mixed motives: We want to care equally for everyone and notice that we care more for those we know and love, and other self-centred motivations. This is our human nature and we need to embrace it with kindness (Chödrön, 1997; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Sustained, inclusive and sustainable ~~economic~~ growth *in happiness*, full and productive employment and decent work for all: A modified SDG 8

Why is it so important to grow? The inventor of Gross National Product (GDP), Simon Kuznets, wanted to include activities he believed contributed to the well-being of a society. My friend Vaddhaka Linn points out that "as an individual gets richer and richer, income matters less and less in terms of improving well-being; and although more income might 'buy' a little more happiness, other things such as having more friends would 'buy' much more." (Linn, 2015, s. 144, hyphens as in original.) For the purpose of this article I define "growth" to mean increase in one's quality of life. In his article "Avoiding the Limits to Growth: Gross National Happiness in Bhutan as a Model for Sustainable Development" Jeremy Brooks (2013) argues for this alternative measure of growth to that of "economic" as adopted by the UN. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, acknowledging that measuring success in terms of Gross National Income (GNI) gives an illusory perspective on growth. GNI is the total domestic and foreign output claimed by residents of a country. It is illusory because it plays into an idea of hyper-productivity that was possible but now is an illusion. It cannot be sustained in a world of finite resources (Jackson, 2019). Jackson suggests that we might obtain modest economic growth rates due to changes in productions and that this requires us to relinquish our expectations of hyper-productivity. Vaddhaka Linn shows how an economy based on outer perspectives is possible (Linn, 2015) and to illustrate the point Jeremy Williams applies this to the practice of interior architecture (Williams, 2011). This points to a more realistic perspective on growth.

Second, the focus on "economic growth" in the SDG holds up an unhelpful and inadequate measure for growth. This is important as what is measured gets developed (Chriqui, O'Connor & Chaloupka, 2011). What is important in SDG 8 is *sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all"*. This means that whatever we do must be sustainable into the foreseeable future, that everyone is included (according to their abilities) and can grow and contribute to society through full and decent employment. We can do this without "economic growth". Bhutan is perhaps the most comprehensive example of this today with their Gross National Happiness (GNH) (Jeremy, 2013; Maria Luisa, 2017; Ritu, 2017). They replace "growth" with "happiness" and put in place several indicators to measure this.

Figure 1: Ritu, 2017

Measuring national happiness or happiness in general is not easy and GDH has much room for improvement. There is also a discussion if happiness or well-being should be the concern of a state (Bates, 2009). Bhutan is founded on Buddhist values and of central importance in Buddhism is that of alleviating suffering and cultivation of universal loving-kindness (Sangharakshita, 1998). Against this backdrop GNH makes sense. Bates' critique asks if most Bhutanese subscribe to this value, without offering an answer. We could ask a similar question of economic growth: Should economic growth be the concern of a state? And to the extent that most people adhere to some religion where love and well-being of people are central, would not well-being or happiness be a relevant measure? Would it not be more relevant than economic growth? An example from history is how king Ashoka introduced values into his rule of India 2nd Century BCE as a guiding principle whilst also practicing tolerance (Bhatta, 2005). It would therefore be interesting to see how the UN could further develop and improve the GNH index and use it as a guide for the SDG of "Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth *in happiness*, full and productive employment and decent work for all". To facilitate this shift, we might draw on generosity as a virtue, value and practice to foster collective solutions and cooperation. Margaret A. Brown found that the practice of generosity affects one's views on social power and intergroup relationships (M. A. Brown, 2011) and Martha Stratton gives accounts on the power of generosity in handling the chaos after an extremely destructive flood in Louisiana, in August 2016 (Stratton, 2016). The importance and practice of generosity is standard fare in most religious moral discourse yet not given much concern in public debate (Miller, 2018). We might therefore do well in

reorienting our focus in this SDG from a pursuit of economic growth to that of generosity to facilitate happiness or quality of life.

Practicing contentment to ensure no poverty or hunger for anyone: SDG 1 & 2

One reason why "economic" is included in SDG 10, mentioned above, is perhaps to alleviate fear of economic stagnation and collapse. This fear makes sense within the current economic framework based on an expectation of continued economic growth in response to population growth (Linn, 2015). Many people like their families to grow and that requires more resources to feed and shelter them in ways we are used to. The fear also makes sense in terms of our neuro-psychological makeup. We are to a large extent programmed to procreate and it is difficult to give up goods or benefits we are used to (Kahneman, 2004).

These challenges are well known in the Buddhist tradition and there are many practices to deal with them (Linn, 2015; Sangharakshita, 1998). An important prerequisite is to want to engage with the practice. This itself is no easy feat in a society that is increasingly shot through with marketing efforts and strategies (Clark, 1989). It can be done all the same, and recent developments in mindfulness shows promising signs of increased awareness of and desire to cultivate such practices (K. W. Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Alex Linley & Orzech, 2009).

Non-Buddhists might also be reluctant to engage with a practice from another religion from fear that it might conflict with their own religious practices or be reluctant to engage with any religious practice at all. Ritu points to a secularization of a Buddhist concept and practice, that I found parallel the developments in mindfulness mentioned above:

> The Buddhist notion of the inter-connectedness of all phenomenon influences GNH (Gross National Happiness) in its holistic vision of inter-dependence between humans and their environment, while its multi-dimensional nature attributes equal weighting to all domains (Wangmo and Valk 2012). In contrast to GDP (Gross Domestic Product)-centric development that promotes economic growth to the exclusion of spiritual and mental development and subjective wellbeing (Thinley 2012), the holistic nature of GNH promotes the middle-path approach of maintaining a balance between the needs of the mind and the body (GNHC 2010; Verma 2016a, 2016b). Both degrowth and GNH aim to balance economic needs with spiritual and emotional needs, maximize wellbeing with minimizing suffering, nuance outer happiness with inner happiness, and material wellbeing with non-material wellbeing. Although the inter-relation between Buddhism and GNH is detailed elsewhere (Verma 2016a), GNH is the secularization of a Buddhist concept that places meaningful happiness and deeper values in life as its central purpose. (Ritu, 2017, s. 484)

Whether such statements are enough to persuade those reluctant to engage with "religious practices" remains to be seen.

The practice of contentment starts with mindfulness: A friendly acceptance of one's experience in the moment. This implies not automatically seeking new and pleasurable experiences when bored, like buying something new, or avoiding unpleasant experiences, like refurbishing one's kitchen because it seems old fashioned. The practice of contentment also involves engaging with some meaningful activity or non-activity for oneself and others.

This might be reflecting on or expressing gratitude, educating oneself, engaging with the arts, friendships or altruistic activities. This means that contentment does not leave a vacuum of life experience. Rather, one replaces some unsustainable activities with sustainable ones, and preferably ones that increase the quality of life for oneself and others. (Sangharakshita, 2012) (Garland et al., 2015).

Changing habits is difficult. Kahneman suggests that habits associated with System 1 are much harder to change consciously than we usually acknowledge (Kahneman, 2004). Robbins and Costa problematize the way we think and experiment to understand habits, particularly from a neuropsychological perspective. Lessons from this and future research might help us engage more intelligently in dealing with consummatory behaviour (Robbins & Costa, 2017). Another way to look at habits from a psychological perspective is how our life experiences provide a background, or Structured Ground, for the dilemmas we perceive and choices we make (G. B. Kjønstad, 2016). Making the structures in the ground conscious can empower the individual to change behaviour (Kjonstad & Willmott, 1995).

Much research bring out the relational aspect of any collective change whether social (Kwon & Nicolaides, 2019; Scharmer, 2009) or organisational (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2012; Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger & Smith-Jentsch, 2012). As we create meaning through relations the sustainability shift can perhaps most easily take place in communities of people who to some extent share the same values and practices. As most major religions share values of contentment to alleviate poverty and hunger in others this can be a useful source of support. Drawing on relevant research and combining those with our local practises we can draw up recommendations for practicing contentment to live more sustainable lives. Here is one example based on what is often known as the six perfections or *paramitas*:

- Human Rights based ethics that are acceptable to the different religions as a basis to see our interconnectedness to support the sharing of resources, knowledge and technology.
- Mindfulness and empathy to see what is needed, for people, relationships and the ecology.
- Generosity to let go of privileges and applaud change to motivate individuals, groups, organisations and nations.
- Courage and energy to engage system 2 thinking (Kahneman), do something, apply available and new technology wisely, and strive for perfection.
- Patience in accepting that change will take time and that we will not reach perfection.
- Wisdom to applaud change, learn from experience, empower individuals and institutionalise good practice.

A challenge can be to put internal and external rivalry of conversions and focus on after-lives aside to alleviate poverty and hunger in this life. This brings us to the final perspective. That of communication.

Communication for partnership: SDG 17

The final SDG I want to focus on in this article is that of partnership. As mentioned above we cannot solve climate problems on our own as individuals, nations or organizations. The Corona pandemic of 2020 showed how we can coordinate efforts on a global scale once

motivated. With increasing extreme-whether people might become motivated to similar global cooperation. A key aspect in this will be communication and I will look at four Buddhist guidelines for effective communication (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979; Scharmer, 2009; Shantigarbha, 2018).

Let's start with a story from the life of the Buddha. At one point the silversmith Cunda asked what rituals of transformation the Buddha preferred after having listed the traditional rites of the Brahmins. The Buddha describes three rituals for the body, four for speech and three for the mind (Bodhi & Thera, 2000 10, 17, 10 (PTS5, 262)). The rituals or precepts for speech which we are concerned with here are: Abstaining from false, slanderous, harsh or useless communication and instead practice truthful, harmonious, friendly and helpful communication.

First it is important to speak the truth. This comes with a caveat that the truth cannot be fully articulated – by its very nature (Anālayo, 2015; Magee, 1997; Sangharakshita, 1998). At best it is an experience. But we can practice truthful communication and strive towards grounding ourselves in the most up to date facts available to us to describe the world as we experience it. This is an important counterbalance to "fake-news" and ideologically re-writing history whilst hiding commonly known facts – on either side of political or religious orientations (Tranter & Booth, 2015).

Second, we are recommended to refrain from slanderous communication and instead foster harmony. I take "harmony" here to allow for differing of opinion, heated debates and agreements to disagree. As my teacher once said "honest collision is better than dishonest collusion" (Sangharakshita, 1979/1995, s. 79). The intention of the precept seems to be that of facilitating an ongoing dialog. This is particularly important as dialog over sustainability issues are likely to polarize both religiously, politically and socially (Bolsen & Shapiro, 2018). The precept brings awareness to how we speak about people who are not present.

Third, we are called on to abstain from harsh communication and instead engage in friendly communication. This does not mean that we need to be all 'nice' and 'politically correct'. Rather, it is to ensure the dialog stays within what is often referred to as the window of tolerance (Salvesen & Wästlund, 2017). This model claims that when the heat of a situation exceeds a certain point, which is individually and culturally conditioned, one can no longer take in others point of view but react in defensive of aggressive ways to protect oneself. The implication is threefold. First, we need to take responsibility for our own emotional states to recognise when we go out of our window of tolerance and know something about how to get inside the window again. Second, we need skills to prevent people getting outside the window of tolerance and skills to help people get back into the window once outside. Third, we need to acknowledge that it is common to leave one's window of tolerance and nothing to be ashamed of when it happens to us. We are therefore encouraged to communicate as friendly and respectful as we can and encourage those, we are in contact with to do the same. Having said that, sometimes it is necessary to shout about injustice or unsustainable behaviour.

Finally, we are encouraged not to engage in useless communication but to be helpful. I think this is a key point to keep the dialog happening. The dialog needs to be seen to be helpful to all parties for them to want to engage in it. No matter how truthful, harmonious or friendly you communicate, if it is of no relevance people will not engage (Bolsen & Shapiro, 2018). People need to see how they might benefit from more sustainable living. This was brought out by the Corona pandemic in 2020. Through an enormous and unified media

cover, with a few exceptions like Brazil's president Jair Bolsonary (Phillips, 2020), it was obvious what the benefit was to people staying at home, and an unprecedented amount of people stayed at home. Nudging also tries to make it obvious to people why change is needed and make it easy to do something about it (Kasperbauer, 2017). A good example is The Sustainability Book: A Christian faith perspective on the Sustainable Development Goals (Almås & Skaland, 2020). It brings together information, quotes, questions for reflections, challenges and prayers all related to each of the 17 SDGs.

This takes us full circle back to the beginning of mindfulness. In order to appreciate something as potentially useful we need to be mindful of it. For example when mindful of electric cars as alternative to combustion engines, we might engage in an internal dialog about the truthfulness of the pros and cons of electric vehicles, avoid potential unfounded undermining views or opinions and engage in an open, friendly and curious investigation about its usefulness for ourselves and others. We can also engage in external dialogs to find out what is most helpful in the current situation, learning both from the past and planning for the future (Scharmer, 2009; Shantigarbha, 2018).

I like to think about these communication guidelines like stones in an old stone bridge. On my side I have my view, opinion or truth. On your side you have yours. If I first put down a stone of friendliness on my side, a stone of helpfulness on your side and place a keystone of harmonising in the middle we can cross from one side to the other and back as much as we like. If one of the stones drop the bridge is likely to collapse.

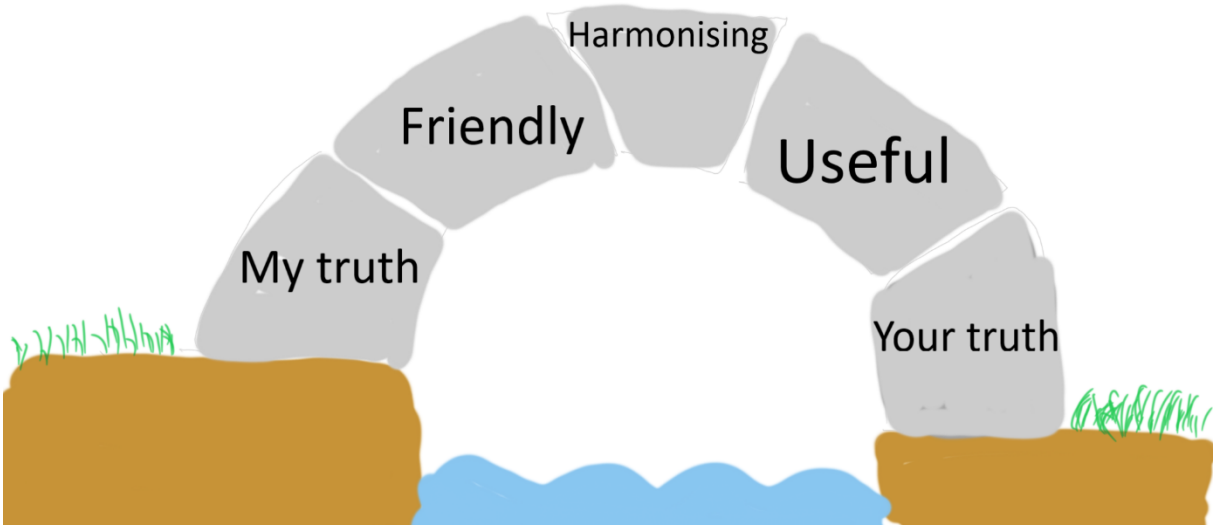

Figure 2: Communication bridge with the elements of truth (yours and mine), friendliness, harmonising and usefulness.

Such dialog is likely to give rise to doubt, scepticism and fear – as change often does. It is then important to have a framework of understanding that can welcome the doubt, scepticism and fear and give some simple guidelines as to how to precede (Scharmer, 2009). Religions can provide such a frame and guidelines.

Suggestions for future research

From one point of view what is written here is simple and perhaps obvious. Yet it is very hard to put into practice. We need to know more about the mechanisms that hold us back, individually and perhaps more as groups and religious organisations. To this end we need to listen better to what is going on inside: What engages us and what enrages us. When this becomes clearer, we can listen to others more attentively. We also need to know more about what it would require to opening dialog up further within religious groups and organisations, and between them. Another question is how one might incorporate more training in mindfulness and communication skills into various groups and arenas and see if this would increase people's quality of life and facilitate change to more sustainable ways of living.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to bring out a perspective and some practices that can help us live more sustainably in a changing world. To indicate what role religions in general might play in shifting to more sustainable ways of living I want to quote Veldman, Szasz and Haluza-DeLay who writes at the end of their introduction to a collection of essays addressing how the world's religions are responding to climate change (Veldman, Szasz & Haluza-DeLay, 2013).

The various authors emphasize the importance of religions in giving substance and power to social norms, social capital, lifestyle patterns, creation care and human dignity. And then there is simply the brute reality of the political power of religious institutions in the world! Arresting climate change is not just beyond science – it is also beyond the state. Religious movements and institutions, as have been found also with businesses, cities and NGOs, have the mobilizing power to enlist and de-list multitudes of citizens in cause of…of what? Well, whatever causes are invigorated by the idea of anthropogenic climate change; as this volume shows, there is no single authorized response to climate change.

The Buddhist perspective brought out in this article is five-fold, based on the most common Buddhist ethical guidelines. First, mindfulness can help us become aware of the threats to unsustainable living and benefits to sustainable living. The current global upsurge of interest in mindfulness provides a good basis to increase mindfulness. Developments in mindfulness show how a move from empathy to altruism as intention can prevent burnout in difficult times. Drawing on insight from elements of Buddhism might also help us see through some of our illusions surrounding and supporting our unsustainable lifestyles (SDG11). Second, to really support heightened mindfulness we need to strengthen our care and love for one another, and not just the ones we like or agree with. To foster global cooperation and trust on the scale required to save a climate fit for humans we need to learn also to love our enemies and thus reduce inequalities (SDG10). Third, I challenged the wording of SDG 8 to replace "economic" with "in happiness" to make: "Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth *in happiness*, full and productive employment and decent work for all". This can help dispel illusions about economic growth and help focus on more adequate measures for growth. To facilitate this shift, I suggest drawing more explicitly on the virtue, value and practice of generosity. Fourth, I call for a practice of contentment to facilitate SDG 1 and 2 of alleviating poverty and hunger. This is particularly challenging in

times of intense marketing creating wants and desires. Finally, I acknowledged that we need to improve our communication skills to facilitate more effective collaboration and looked at four guidelines for communication: truthful, harmonising, friendly and useful. I also offered some suggestions for future research.

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