

# Becoming Porous, Circular: Spiritual Interventions for an Ecocidal Humanism

by Chris Lang

*Abstract: Becoming Porous, Circular* is more of a prayer than a prescription. In a climate marked by fear, fires, and corporate fascism, the contemporary container of sustainability must be carefully repurposed to allow space for alternative ways of living and dying. Arising from an era saturated with commoditized solutions rather than pathways to self/other-realization, this piece aspires to sow seeds of return into continuity and circularity. We are asked to consider *what is foreclosed when we give our expertise to the experts* and *what is discovered when we enter in relation*. As Buddhist and Indigenous philosophical praxes dance around one another, we create a rhythm that reconfigures linear time to open up ancient, present, prospective dimensions of awareness.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, holism, Indigenous thought, fasting, minimalism, circularity, relationality

Sustainability is a growing public concern as increasing evidence of climate-related disasters saturates our mainstream news apparatus and social media feeds. At the same time, the word has become fraught with overuse, its meaning stretched into a far too-wide net that encompasses everything from Indigenous land sovereignty to renewable energy, from reusable metal straws to organic agriculture. While the rhetoric of sustainability marches us forward, it often treads over its own contradictions, invisibilizing the many historical, eco-social ills and corporate complicities it continues to produce while ushering us towards “green” futures.<sup>1</sup> *Sustainability for whom*, is a question posed by many of its outspoken interrogators. Recent lawsuits confronting Tesla and other tech companies that source Congolese rare-earth metals expose the atrocities from cobalt’s mineral extraction process. Social ills, ranging from Indigenous villagers’ displacement to child slavery and limb maiming, compiled on top of environmental degradation that renders habitats unlivable in pursuits and acquisitions of minerals linked to lithium-ion batteries. The uneven and racialized production/consumption of such goods has prompted new discourses regarding the pollution-haven hypothesis and ecologically unequal exchanges of material pleasure

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, A. (2019, December 16). *Apple and Google named in US lawsuit over Congolese child cobalt mining deaths*. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/dec/16/apple-and-google-named-in-us-lawsuit-over-congolese-child-cobalt-mining-deaths>

and disposal.<sup>2</sup> This most confoundingly implicates renewable energy technology, those most insistently buttressed by the discourse of sustainability. Such evidence speaks to this paradox of a sustainable future, a smart gridded “tech-topia” as is often conveyed in imaginaries of a Green New Deal that the word evokes.

Many have called attention to the colonial roots of sustainability and other environmental buzzwords like “conservation” and “wilderness” that simultaneously react to and reify Eurocentric thought and catastrophic interventions on Indigenous livelihoods.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Others investigate the neoliberalizing, chilling whiteness of ethical consumer movements,<sup>6,7</sup> and pitfalls of corporate greenwashing,<sup>8</sup> all of which fall under the umbrella of sustainability discourse. And still yet, sustainability remains ever important even to the most critical, committed environmental and social justice scholars and activists.

Given the many forms and expressions of sustainability, it is difficult to pin down what the word even means. This field statement is an attempt at breathing new life (and death) into the word, with the aims to add fresh perspectives that are often overlooked in a prevailing rationalistic, efficiency-chasing, and positive orientation towards progress that exists today.

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Between writing this, I walk outside to the overgrown garden in my mom’s yard. The seasons have changed and many plants show the signs of transition. The basil has lost nearly all its vibrant green color, pungent flavor, and aromatic fragrance. It bolted up into beautiful spires, with each stem surrounded by enfolded petals resembling mini mosques of radical geometry. The majority of these former flower heads running up the

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<sup>2</sup> Roberts, J. T., & Parks, B. C. (2009). Ecologically unequal exchange, ecological debt, and climate justice: The history and implications of three related ideas for a new social movement. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 50(3-4), 385-409.

<sup>3</sup> Holt, F. L. (2005). The catch-22 of conservation: Indigenous peoples, biologists, and cultural change. *Human Ecology*, 33(2), 199-215.

<sup>4</sup> Kareiva, P., Lalasz, R., & Marvier, M. (2011). Conservation in the Anthropocene: beyond solitude and fragility. *Breakthrough Journal*, 2(Fall), 29-37

<sup>5</sup> Cronon, W. (1996). The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature. *Environmental history*, 1(1), 7-28.

<sup>6</sup> Guthman, J. (2011). “If Only They Knew: The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food.” In *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*, ed. Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman, 263-282. Cambridge, MS: MIT press.

<sup>7</sup> Guthman, J. (2008). Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1171-1183.

<sup>8</sup> Johnston, J. (2008). The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of Whole Foods Market. *Theory and society*, 37(3), 229-270.

stem are dried and browned. Only pouches on the stem tips remain green with moistened cellulose. I pull off one of the browned petals and delicately place it between my thumb and forefinger. With scrutinous care and fascination, I peel the tiny pedals away. Inside the leafy pouch I find four perfectly diminutive black seeds. I think about the potential of just one of these seeds to create what I now witness: an overgrown vessel of vegetation that only a few months ago was the “bee’s knees,” as affirmed by its visitation from numerous pollinator species; now, here as the result of that reciprocity, it harbors thousands of seeds just like the one it sprouted from. Each seed here contains the potentiality to sprout new life of its own. In fifteen minutes of time, using an old salsa container to hold the other dried pouches, I collect several hundred seeds. Today feels like a deepening of my relationship to sweet basil. This interaction enabled me to experience a circularity of sorts. In investigating the dried flower heads of the stem, parts that I had overlooked this entire month as superfluous non-leafy non-essentials for my own consumption, I realized the plant can teach me how to care for it in ways beyond short-sightedness. Touching the plant, carrying its scent and essential oils in my fingerprint skin, I inhale deeply and am reminded that curiosity and consciousness are their own forms of sustainability. A few days later, I notice a similar transition taking place on the lemon balm stems in the other raised bed. Worlds of survival that exist in the nooks and crannies of life, the folds of dried flower petals, outside our distracted purview, recenter and focus us as daily reminders of a circularity that we can and shall return to.

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Let us first examine the assumed meaning of sustainability as we most often encounter it in contemporary discourse: which is, the ability *to prolong*. To sustain in this sense is to provide a means for longevity, a means to continue to exist. Sustainability has been employed as a concept to ensure our species’ survival into perpetuity, which is often linked to the habitability of the planet itself. To sustain can also mean to support. For example; a meditative practice of chanting sustains me in times of distress. The etymological derivatives of *to sustain* come from the Latin word *sostenere*, which means “to hold up; bear; endure; suffer,” leading us to the less common usage of *sustain*, which is “to incur injury and duress.” Sustain is comprised of the Latin preposition *sub*, meaning “from below,” and the Proto-Indo-European root *\*ten*, meaning “to stretch.”<sup>9</sup>

Might our incorporation of the etymology of “to sustain” inform our analysis of modern sustainability, a conception that is currently over-represented by perpetuity and cloaked with green-washed innocuity? How might the words “stretched” and “from below” signify

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<sup>9</sup> Sustain. (n.d.). In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved from [https://www.etymonline.com/word/sustain#etymonline\\_v\\_22440](https://www.etymonline.com/word/sustain#etymonline_v_22440)

the top-down pressures that exert themselves onto the most at-risk among us in order for the table of human survival to remain intact, all while promoting this eco-friendly turn towards a renewable future? (Who is, indeed, human?) Once again, *sustainability for whom?* We also may be wise to ask, what does ceasing to sustain mean, and what existential emergencies can sprout from a space of non/sustenance? brontë velez, a self-described trickster and death-doula, raps in their podcast episode of *For the Wild*:

“...Trying to practice and imagine  
That rest could look like action  
That love could look like fasting  
That the work could just be laughing...”<sup>10</sup>

Their bars gesture towards a resistance that resists its own resistance, resisting this “duress from below,” challenging the tendencies of capitalistic sustainability to usher our internalizations of urgency<sup>11</sup> and hyper-responsibilization at the expense of relationships, a result that most often displaces its hazards onto Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, and low income people and communities. Because sustainability intuits a willful survival, a frenetic grasping into continuity, it inevitably is encoded by a rhetoric of urgency. Instead, Bronte foregrounds how they can lean into rest and fasting and laughter. Sustainability, such a proud claim to endure by means of duress from below, might do more to lay itself down. The aims of this piece are to suggest otherwise ways of understanding and (un)becoming, of returning to the source, of circularizing the linear model of accumulation/collapse that has thus far been prevailing.

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“All cancer cells, no matter where they accumulate in the body, are the same. They all eat sugar and excrete lactic acid. In the same way, lactic acid accumulates after vigorous exercise in the muscles; this lactic acid will eventually make the entire body acidic, creating a condition known as metabolic acidosis. In an attempt to buffer the acid, the body will begin pulling from alkaline reserves again. The liver as a protective measure will start converting the lactic acid back into sugar (glucagon). And this is how the liver becomes a slave to the process of feeding cancer.” -Dr. Bobby Price<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Young, A. (Producer). (2020, April 6). For the World, DeeplyRooted: Black Mary-Olivering with brontë velez /167 [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from

<https://forthewild.world/listen/deeply-rooted-black-mary-olivering-with-bronte-velez-167>. brontë velez shares this rap verse in For the Wild podcast on DeeplyRooted: Black Mary-Olivering.

<sup>11</sup> Whyte, K. (2020). Too late for indigenous climate justice: Ecological and relational tipping points. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 11(1), e603.

<sup>12</sup> Price, Bobby. *Vegucation over Medication: The Myths, Lies, And Truths About Modern Foods And Medicines*. Wise Old Owl Publishing, 2018. Page 109.

I'd like to take some time to sit with this excerpt from Bobby Price's *Vegucation over Medication*. In it, Price describes a feedback loop in which cancer creates the conditions for its own self-perpetuation, which, when left unchecked, lead to inevitably fatal outcomes for any person diagnosed. Lactic acid and sugar are both inputs and outputs of the loop in cancer's quest for expansion and cellular conversion, a loop that seems more like a linear path off the cliff of survival. In dutifully fulfilling its role, the liver attempts to remedy the symptom (acidity), only to create the raw material that feeds the cancer's growth (sugar). Eventually, the liver fails while under constant duress of this vice grip. The system eventually collapses due to metabolic acidosis. In my attempt to thread through scales of the cell, organ, body, community, country, and world, I consider the enslaved, tireless liver to be a useful metaphor; one that can help us reconsider our own futile positionings in a struggle for sustainability that is perpetually re-subsumed into capitalistic models of extraction.

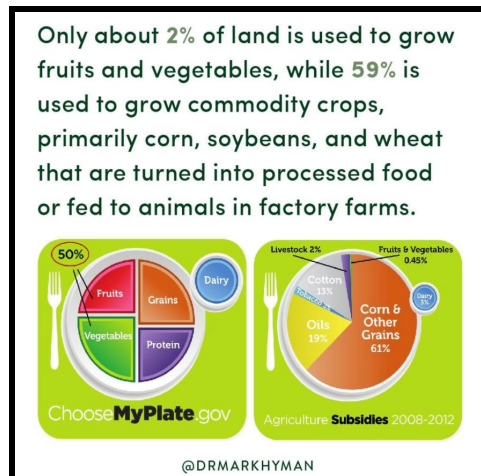
Prevailing biomedical treatments of cancer (radiotherapy, surgery, and chemotherapy) exist at the detriment of alternative remedies that embrace more spiritual leanings, individual commitments to self-transformation, and behavior and dietary reform. T Colin Campbell, a specialist on disease-preventative nutrition in his two-decades long research culminating in *The China Study*, remarks, "if it isn't a new surgery, chemo cocktail, or radiation protocol, the cancer industry isn't buying."<sup>13</sup> In his statement, *it* refers to the viable solutions to the modern epidemic of cancer that causes one in four deaths in the US each year. Campbell examines root causes of the disease, arguing that cancer mortality is not as deterministic as the narratives of genetics or stage of diagnosis dictate. His research demonstrates that cancer cells can be turned on and off by particular inflammatory dietary inputs, like casein. This information appears to be dubiously overlooked, perhaps even suppressed, by standard medical practices.

Marion Nestle, while serving her role as a senior food nutrition policy advisor of the US Department of Human Health and Services, confesses to have witnessed the heavy influence by sugar and animal agricultural lobbyists on shaping the language of food policy recommendations. For example, she describes that research-backed statements like "eat less beef" were altered to instead say "eat less saturated fat," serving to obscure the culprits of disease for the public at large. In *Food Politics*, Nestle writes, "Diet is a political issue. Because dietary advice affects food sales, and because

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<sup>13</sup> Campbell, T. Colin, and Howard Jacobson. *Whole: rethinking the science of nutrition*. BenBella Books, 2013. Page 36.

companies demand a favorable regulatory environment for their products, dietary practices raise political issues that cut right to the heart of democratic institutions.”<sup>14</sup>



Nestle also highlights the discontinuities between choosemyplate.gov’s USDA recommended dietary guidelines (which is already watered down, mind you) and actual agricultural subsidies, saying that if one were to eat according to these tax-payer subsidies, “more than three-quarters of [one’s] plate would be taken up by a massive corn fritter.”<sup>15</sup> Statements like these, along with the overwhelming evidence of American comorbidities and metabolic syndrome impacting almost 35% of US adults<sup>16</sup> (and rising) speaks to the need for aligned, value-based conceptions of health to be foregrounded. Without such a renaissance of values, it seems we are to remain bound in a lucrative/exactive matrix where proposed solutions gesture little to no guidance in ameliorating the root causes.

Lakota doctor Donald Warne describes an Indigeous medicine wheel, one that consists of a circle and a cross. He explains that the circle connects the ends of the cross to demonstrate that all things, even those in opposition, the North and the South, the East and West, are connected on this earth, intersecting right in the middle. “If I go East...and I go East...and I keep going East...eventually where am I going to wind up?” Dr Warne brings us into his circular worldview. As he points to each of the four

<sup>14</sup> Nestle, M. (2013). *Food politics: How the food industry influences nutrition and health* (Vol. 3). Univ of California Press. Page 28.

<sup>15</sup> Hyman, Mark. [Mark Hyman]. (2020, October 7). If you compare the USDA Dietary Guideline recommendations versus what they actually support, you get a significant mismatch [Facebook status update and infographic] Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/drmarkhyman/photos/a.163412217022869/3764063766957678/?type=3>

<sup>16</sup> Moore, J. X., Chaudhary, N., & Akinyemiju, T. (2017). Peer reviewed: Metabolic syndrome prevalence by race/ethnicity and sex in the United States, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1988–2012. *Preventing chronic disease*, 14.

directions, he says, “I am over there. I am over there. I am over there. I am over there. And I am right here.” The magic of circularity is simultaneity. In recalling the rite of initiation in his own Dagara tradition, Priest Malidoma Somé echoes this same simple, mystical principle: “[The elder] said that each one of us is a circle like the circle we had formed around the fire. We are both the circle and its center. Without a circle there is no center and vice versa.”<sup>17</sup> Logically, when we lose sight of our circle, we lose our center, our psycho-spiritual space of eternal, everpresent, and unlimited potentiality.

Dr Warne continues, speaking of the isolated nature of modern solutionist approaches to health: “When we look at the histories of modern medicine, all systems of healing used to have spirituality incorporated...but we saw a huge change in the 20th century because of advances in science.”<sup>18</sup> Such a modern overreliance on science and technology has a steep cost for Indigenous and holistic practices, which in turn have allowed a market-based culture of health (and sustainability, indirectly) to persist under the guise of progress unquestioned by the majority of citizens. Our devout faith in progress may date back to an ideology of the “technological fix” promoted by the likes of Alvin Weinberg, who believed rational analysis and technological innovation could “resolve any social issue as an article of faith.”<sup>19</sup> Such a faith in science as a belief system forecloses other ways of knowing, spiritually, intuitively, circularly.

Black feminist thinkers like Sylvia Wynter have duly noted the problematic and violent deployment of the rational Man2, homo oeconomicus, as the next iteration of the colonizing Enlightened Man1 via missionization centuries before. Man2 is buttressed by tenets of human rationality and positivistic natural sciences to dominate the world through knowing and dissecting it, ossifying a racial-gender hierarchy centering European, cisheterosexual male bodies and epistemologies.<sup>20</sup> Weinberg’s propagated belief, one that poses inherent social problems can be translated into technological problems and thereby fixed, severs the many necessary, diverse, and somatic epistemologies that exist within our collective human potentiality for problem-solving, particularly in eras of crisis such as this time of mass extinction, widespread social upheaval, and climate change. Such faith in technocracy also elides the historical, social power arrangements that likely created and reify the modern eco-social

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<sup>17</sup> Malidoma Somé shares the wisdom of his elders from the Dagara tradition.

<sup>18</sup> Warne, Donald [Donald Warne]. (2014, September 23). All my relations - a traditional Lakota approach to health equity. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3phTundagzQ>. As the director of NDSU School, Dr Warne merges both his learned Western and Indigenous Lakota healing traditions.

<sup>19</sup> Johnston, S. F. (2018). The technological fix as social cure-all: origins and implications. *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine*, 37(1), 47-54. Page 50.

<sup>20</sup> Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review*, 3(3), 257-337.

predicaments, those being Indigenous genocide and displacement, anthropocentrism, slavery and modern racism (most frequently expressed in anti-Blackness), and cisheterosexism. To demonstrate the pitfalls of progress in the post-colonial era, one might consider that the percentage of hungry people globally increased by 11% despite promises of Green Revolution solutions.<sup>21</sup> Such exchanges between post-colonial and metropole countries, mediated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, further indebted many “new” nation states that had been devastated by colonization, cementing the dispossession of Indigenous farmers from their ancestral practices that guaranteed food sovereignty, serving merely to usher them into a global underclass as impoverished factory farmers.<sup>22</sup> Resisting this seemingly inevitable outcome is part of the Indigenous struggle, as Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson notes: “the massive shift of Indigenous peoples into the urban wage economy and the middle class cannot be the solution to dispossession, because this consolidates dispossession.”<sup>23</sup> How can we shift paradigms beyond normative notions of progress? How can we center an empowered individual and collective body that resists and refuses predatory or ineffective handouts disguised amicably as progress, sustainability, and health.

So I return back to the discussion of cancer. Rather than rushing to cure it with a “big three” solution, Bobby Price advises those diagnosed to starve cancer growth through rest and a strict, purified water fast of up to twenty-one days: “I can assure you that once you begin to abstain from food, you will begin to heal. Fasting while consuming liters of natural spring water acts as a hot shower to cleanse the tissues on a deep cellular level.”<sup>24</sup> His book then describes the day-by-day physiological detoxification experience that takes place in one’s body while water fasting and resting. To summarize in my own words, it appears that because the cancer cells have lost their sustenance, they naturally wither away. To undergo such an unorthodox, perhaps radical, treatment of refusal and to purge one’s microbiome of harmful bacteria and cellular waste is to choose an intimate form of micro-scalar decolonization, an experience that could certainly be considered one of duress, “stretching” one’s willpower. To resist the prescribed solutions is to meet existential uncertainty as if one is taking a leap of faith. What and how can collective sustainability learn from a refusal like this, one that affirms our bodies as sites of health and miraculous healing, and one that riskily resists

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<sup>21</sup> Patel, R., & Moore, J. W. (2017). *A history of the world in seven cheap things: A guide to capitalism, nature, and the future of the planet*. Univ of California Press. Page 151.

<sup>22</sup> Holt-Giménez, E. (2008). Out of AGRA: The green revolution returns to Africa. *Development*, 51(4), 464-471.

<sup>23</sup> Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. U of Minnesota Press. Page 88.

<sup>24</sup> Price, Bobby. *Vegucation over Medication: The Myths, Lies, And Truths About Modern Foods And Medicines*. Wise Old Owl Publishing, 2018. Page 202.



prescriptive outcomes altogether? How does the overrepresentation of the “big three” solutions to cancer play out in our discussions of sustainability, and what otherwise ways of sustaining exist beyond their order? I argue that routes of rest/refusal are inherently guided by a spiritual component, an embodied consciousness that confronts an external, solutionist-prescription approach that detaches our relationships to the very remedies we seek.

Unsurprisingly, holistic health of the body seamlessly aligns with that of the planet; and intuitively, violence on the body is directly tied to violence on the land.<sup>25</sup> Numerous researchers have uncovered the environmental and social consequences of industrialized animal agriculture and their enmeshed supply chains.<sup>26,27</sup> A global dependency on plastics and oil is deeply tied to racialized and concentrated environmental injustice, and these impacts are now so far-reaching that water supplies are tainted with plastic chemical residue.<sup>28</sup> There is an ethical and environmental case for “sustainability,” depending on how that is defined. Writing this in the midst of COVID-19, one also must recognize that agricultural intensification, the encroachment of humans and livestock into wildlife territory, and the extensive use of antibiotics on livestock animals in overcrowded confinements all increase the risk of zoonotic disease proliferation.<sup>29</sup>

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What happens when reform and repair are packaged (often in plastic) to us in the form of a commodity, be it a solar panel or a vaccine? The dialectic between individual and collective is now almost exclusively mediated through commoditized relations, often foreclosing the spiritual possibilities of self-discovery, transcendence, curiosity, reciprocity,<sup>30</sup> interdependence, and even death on otherwise terms. It is no secret that commodity relationships implicate people and the environment in uneven and obscure ways, invisibilizing their externalities. While the alternative food, fair trade, and ethical consumer movements attempt to salvage the globally-derived, unaccountable

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<sup>25</sup> Koonsmo, E. M., & Pacheco, A. K. (2016). Violence on the land, violence on our bodies: Building an Indigenous response to environmental violence. *Women's Earth Alliance Native Youth Sexual Health Network*. This response explains the interconnected violences of the land and the female body from an Indigenous perspective.

<sup>26</sup> Starmer, E., & Wise, T. A. (2007). *Living high on the hog: factory farms, federal policy, and the structural transformation of swine production* (No. 1434-2016-118875).

<sup>27</sup> DeWalt, B. R. (1983). The cattle are eating the forest. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 39(1), 18-23.

<sup>28</sup> Vethaak, A. D., & Leslie, H. A. (2016). Plastic debris is a human health issue.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, B. A., Grace, D., Kock, R., Alonso, S., Rushton, J., Said, M. Y., ... & Pfeiffer, D. U. (2013). Zoonosis emergence linked to agricultural intensification and environmental change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(21), 8399-8404.

<sup>30</sup> Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

commodities through increasing transparency and equitable relations, they make-up a very slim margin of the overall market share, and still yet, fail to disrupt market forces altogether that divorce spiritual, integrative components from our overall means of survival.<sup>31</sup> Such an overall acceptance of this ever-connected yet ever-more deeply isolated means of livelihood speaks volumes to the prevailing belief system of a disintegrated relationality. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz affirms this as she describes the eco-cultural rupture of colonization-genocide: “Once in the hands of settlers, the land itself was no longer sacred, as it had been for the Indigenous. Rather, it was private property, a commodity to be acquired and sold.”<sup>32</sup> One can intuit that worldviews where land is understood to be inert undoubtedly extend such a denuded perspective to the beings of that very land in the same constricted, commoditized manner. We begin to understand, as Indigenous people and scholars have been pointing out for centuries, that the ecological upheaval of our times is entirely connected to a *spiritually impoverished mentality* that allows us to disaggregate pieces from the semantic whole, a sickness of the collective culture that impels us to overlook the dignity of Life itself in the myriad transactional decisions we make in order to survive modernity. Logically, if we can internalize that the eco-social cataclysm we witness is, in fact, rooted in these many deep social ills of the same strain, it feels most imperative that we instill spiritual holism *sociologically*, as opposed to technological solutionism *dictatorially*, to resolve these ills, cultivating within our own hearts the seeds to usher in alternative consciousnesses. Ironically, the original meaning technology (derived from the proto-Indo-European word *\*teks-na*, meaning “craft, of weaving or fabricating” and the Greek word *logia*, “a speaking, discourse, theory, science”) has been arguably co-opted by a disintegrated progress-oriented warpspeed that forgoes social weaving.<sup>33</sup> *Social* technologies, belief systems that strive for ecological balance and practices of peacekeeping, have been implemented for millennia across human societies: “The Ju/’hoansi realize that their most important natural resource is themselves, the mutual understanding and cooperation they can maintain among themselves. They know that...social technology is one of the oldest and most important human technologies for survival.”<sup>34</sup> Lacking amenities typified by developed countries, the Indigenous bushmen from Kalahari must rely on communal goodwill. As such, they employ the traditional, healing dance to repair ill-will and call in collaboration during times of conflict. The circle

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<sup>31</sup> Mares, T. M., & Peña, D. G. (2011). Environmental and food justice. *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*, 197-220. Page 199.

<sup>32</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An indigenous peoples' history of the United States* (Vol. 3). Beacon Press. Page 55.

<sup>33</sup> Technology. (n.d.) In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=technology>

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, M. K. (Ed.). (2008). *Original instructions: Indigenous teachings for a sustainable future*. Simon and Schuster. Page 102.

is key here, as conflicting persons rotate around each other with dance and prayer, rather than clash with direct confrontation.

Sociology Professor Emeritus, John Brown Childs, an African-Native American of Algonkian Massachusetts and Madagascar descent, explains the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace in his book *Transcommunalism*. This famed Great Peace pact of the formerly warring nations near the Great Lakes is emulated by the image of clasping hands and linking arms of different peoples “in reciprocating relations of trade, friendship, and goodwill,”<sup>35</sup> a cohesion that does not obliterate difference but rather bridges through commonality. I would be remiss to omit the environmental and social devastations of war, where the US military is now recognized as the leading polluter in the world.<sup>36</sup> The militaristic arms of imperialism and neo-colonialism create clearings that allow other polluting industries to take root, such as industrial agricultural farms and petrochemical plantations. I argue that we can no longer afford to examine merely the visible, positivistic primacy of environmental and social devastation. These unconscionable actions are first and foremost, ideas, which are mediated by a cultural fabric that normalizes them. How do we transform culture?

Rarámuri food scholar Enrique Salmón implores his listening audience, “We have to change our language about this issue. We have to stop talking about the environment. We have to stop setting up this barrier, this wall...we *are* the environment, and if we are harming the environment, we are harming ourselves.”<sup>37</sup> Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong mirrors these sentiments at the Bioneers Conference: “In our language, the word for our bodies contains the word for land, so when I say that word...I’m saying that my body is the land.”<sup>38</sup> Salmon, Armstrong, and countless other Indigenous scholars examine how the English language and Eurocentric thought distorts our understanding of interconnectivity, wedging divisions between individuals, between one’s body and the land, between oneself and the environment. Moving beyond anthropocentric isolationism, these porous understandings of interdependence and relationality account for the continuities of violence most frequently experienced on non-developed landscapes, non-wealthy/non-white/non-male/non-cis/non-heterosexual humans, and non-human species. These porous understandings of self/other are thus integral in unmaking/reformulating the white, male, wealthy psycho-spiritual matrix that has created the current rules of engaging survival, as well as the frameworks through which

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<sup>35</sup> Childs, J. B. (2010). *Transcommunalism: From The Politics Of Conversion to an Ethics of Respect*. Temple University Press. Page 51. This quoted remark is Dr Child’s reference to Robert A. Williams Jr.

<sup>36</sup> Woodward, R. (2004). *Military geographies* (Vol. 45). John Wiley & Sons. Page

<sup>37</sup> Nelson, M. K. (Ed.). (2008). *Original instructions: Indigenous teachings for a sustainable future*. Simon and Schuster. Page 102.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*. Page 67.

sustainability and health are taught, thought, and mediated.

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“...it's a war going on outside on the corner  
It's a war on your TV screen every morning  
Not the war with the bombs and the helicopters swarming  
But the war for your soul, that's what everyone's ignoring  
It's a war going on...” -King Los<sup>39</sup>

Because we are sick, the land is sick. And because the land is sick, we become sicker. It is here where I'd like to transition to other eco-spiritual interventions for the ecocidal anthropocentrism we currently face, namely that of Mahayana Buddhism. One central tenet of Buddhist philosophy is that one's thoughts and perceptions shape one's reality. A lay 13th century Japanese monk by the name of Nichiren Daishonin, who is the namesake for Nichiren Buddhism, affirms this in his letter titled 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime': "If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds."<sup>40</sup> This remark makes two important interventions. First, it essentially dissolves any delineation between the self and environment, to the extent that the land one inhabits is merely a reflection of one's own mind. Secondly, it poses that one's mind is ultimately responsible for the state of the land in which one dwells. "Our minds," thus, consists of our beliefs, which ultimately dictate our course of actions to transform the land or continue to view it as impure. This Buddhist concept can work alongside an Indigenous framework whereby both call on the necessary cultural revitalization to uproot the impurities in our minds that would even allow for desecration to be acceptable. Nichiren Daishonin writes, "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?"<sup>41</sup> To pray merely for oneself is futile if the world around us is on the verge of collapse. The porous dialectic of self/other naturally compels one to extend empathy, informed by this interdependence, that seeks reciprocating peace through and

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<sup>39</sup> Los, King [King Los]. (2015, April 22). War ft. Marsha Ambrosius. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8XTe0ec9Zo>. These are the opening lyrics by King Los in his song titled "War," where he suggests that the "war for the soul" is the elephant in the room in contemporary discussions regarding the state of the world.

<sup>40</sup> Nichiren Shōshū Kokusai Sentā. Goshō Hon'yaku linkai. (2003). *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Soka Gakkai. This particular section is taken from Nichiren Daishonin's treatise titled "On Attaining Buddhahood in this Lifetime."

<sup>41</sup> Nichiren Shōshū Kokusai Sentā. Goshō Hon'yaku linkai. (2003). *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Soka Gakkai. This particular section is taken from Nichiren Daishonin's treatise titled "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."

beyond one's respective body. Nichiren also states, "When a nation becomes disordered, it is the spirits that first show signs of rampancy. Because the spirits become rampant, all the people of the nation become disordered."<sup>42</sup> This passage hints at the supreme importance of spiritual entities in manifesting the physical symptoms of the land, be it war or environmental degradation or social upheaval. Ultimately, the philosophy that rulemakers and everyday people believe in dictate such an ordering or disordering. Do we believe in a philosophy that upholds the dignity of Life or one that creates the most financial return for our investment?

Nichiren Buddhism offers numerous theoretical and practical interventions that dovetail into Indigenous worldviews, providing alternative vantage points to examine our modern eco-social crisis. First is the Buddhist concept of the simultaneity of cause and effect, a fancy way of saying non-linear time. At the end of the Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Buddhists recite this phrase: "The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end."<sup>43</sup>

At first, this list of words describing reality may appear clunky, but the phrase "their consistency from beginning to end" always gives me pause. These factors that make up any phenomena, from appearance to manifest effect, describe the causality of their expression in the world. For something to have consistency from beginning to end actually means for the end to be attached to the beginning. In this way, the two are not different. Similarly, the basil seed I described earlier also becomes the plant stem and is then also the flower and the dead composting leaves which then become the soil. Everything is everything.<sup>44</sup> In *Interdependence: Biology and Beyond*, Kriti Sharma explains this phenomenon as contingent existence, calling attention to our epistemological failure of naming objects as discrete, and thus, isolated entities when that cannot be the case. "Their consistency from beginning to end" gestures to the ultimate reality that there is neither a beginning nor ending (even when we can sometimes a "beginning" or "ending"), that they enfold onto each other circularly through the moment of our present awareness.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Watson, B. (1993). trans. The Lotus Sutra.

<sup>44</sup> In reference to the famous Lauryn Hill song from her record-breaking album "Miseducation of Lauryn Hill." In what ways are we being miseducated?

“Pray in the morning to be a hollow bone...it means, pray to be the doorway through which medicine walks.”<sup>45</sup> -Lyla June

How do we get out of the way of our egos, our lesser selves, the flesh and body that make us up but are not the entirety of who we are? How do we hollow out the transient identities and individualisms and baggage we have accumulated in this life to step into our Eternal selves?

If we are fortunate, our bodies will all become mere hollow bones, whose minerals rejoin the rocks and soils to be incorporated into snail shells and bird beaks and squirrel bones and human hairs. This prayer to be a hollow bone is a prayer for the cleansing of our spirit. It is a prayer for one’s understanding of the cycle of life, death, return, and renewal, a continuity so eternal and circular, like the hollow bone itself, that we relinquish attachments to the self with an awareness all things must run their course, knowing we are inseparable from all things. It is a prayer that troubles the prevailing fear-based ideology that attempts to escape from or postpone death by any means necessary. Asé.

To pray is anything but passive. Where does the balance between activism and acceptance lie? What if I truly understood that with each breath I inhaled the Universe itself? How do I make sense of transforming structures that reproduce war, environmental toxicity, and unnecessary suffering while relying on individual consciousness and behavior change? Where do our minds meet to win over devilish functions within each of us and beyond? Prayer. Prayer understands we cannot change that which is outside us until we realize we *are* the outside. brontë velez says, “May we decompose violence of ourselves before we ask it of the world.”<sup>46</sup> Knowing this, we change from within. “Changing within” does not mean shallowly accepting one’s fate, but rather, allowing us to be opened by Spirit, again and again and again. *Pray to be a hollow bone*. From this groundedness we can commence into shaping the world beyond.

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<sup>45</sup> June, Lyla. (2018, March 2). *Lyla June opening, Dig in Food Justice conference, Santa Cruz* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/1573085966331988/videos/1772611009712815/>. As a keynote speaker for a food justice conference at UC Santa Cruz in 2018, *Dig In! Cultivating Inclusive Approaches to Food Justice*, Lyla June shared this prayer from her elders of the Diné tribe. This quote resonates with me, because in the Buddhism I practice, we strive to dissolve the “lesser self” to be in service of a greater, connected whole..

<sup>46</sup> brontë velez shares this prayer in For the Wild podcast on DeeplyRooted: Black Mary-Olivering, referenced earlier.

This Diné teaching mirrors the Buddhist concept of reincarnation. To pray to be a hollow bone is a prayer to return to oneness, to recognize one is both nourished and nourishment. Believing in reincarnation as a praxis enables people to consider their karmic recycling through the Ten Worlds (typically transmigrating between the Six lower worlds of Hell, Hungry Spirits, Animality, Asuras, Humanity, and Heaven), which naturally incentivizes one to work towards reducing the suffering of those around oneself as a means of desiring security and peace in future lives. Discussing reincarnation also opens up a conversation about the inevitability and naturalness of death, demystifying the mystical through prayer that affirms a continuity beyond the visible, experiential realm of life. Death is tragic and also an inescapable fact of life. Too often the discourse of sustainability desperately clings to life in its manifest form, ironically overlooking the deaths-by-design that a sustainable, renewable future requires through its research and development, and technocratic, top-down operatives. I am in no way hoping to downplay the power-laden implications of climate change, nor do I hope we remain fixed in a dependency on fossil fuels which are dire in and of themselves, but we must seriously consider that the sustainable, technological solutions (like geoengineering, predictive modeling, smart-gridded futures, self-driving electric cars) not only shape our consumer palettes to unquestioningly embrace their arrival, but also foreclose otherwise ways of living and dying that are a) not inherently technological and b) possibly more effective in combating ecocide. I am stating that any formulation of health or sustainability that fails to implicate or inspire personal transformation and curiosity, and support those most at-risk to structural violence in doing so, ultimately is a slippery slope of disempowerment. *Trying to practice and imagine / that rest could look like action.* What if the most powerful action one can take is none at all? The deep void of nothingness may be the space of ultimate return and groundedness. How might we water-fast our cannibalistic consumerism to remedy the cancerous, collective crisis of capitalism?

COVID-19 has been a flashpoint to analyze the way our collective fear of death can be weaponized to enforce particular measures of population control (such as mandatory social distancing) that have undoubtedly consolidated money and power deeper into multinational elite pockets, and moved us collectively into an increasingly remote-technology/ data-mined/surveillable future at the expense of interpersonal, in-person connectivity as well small and medium-sized business development. While social distancing seems like a necessary maneuver to uphold, and our failure to have collectively done so has led to the devastating outcome of 215,000 US citizen mortalities and counting, one must also question why there is a glaring silence in mainstream news that discusses how one might cultivate health and immunity in the face of a pandemic beyond commercially-sold consumer retail. To do so fundamentally

opposes a structure that necessitates a manufactured demand, in order to sell, in order to persist. The cultivation of immunity is an ongoing task that requires our swift re-examination of dietary causes of disease and sickness-susceptibility (acidic, inflammatory, and mucus-inducing foods), the benefits of herbalism, practices of holistic self-care, and scrutiny over exposure to unnecessary environmental toxins. Without these invaluable practices of discernment and survival, our population, already disproportionately at-risk with pre-existing conditions that range from Type 2 Diabetes to Heart Disease to Cancer to Asthma--all problems deriving from exposure to environmental pollutants and hyperprocessed, meatified foodways that typify the Standard American Diet--has only one predictable hand to play on the table of responses to the medical system's lucrative, technological equivalent to sustainability: a cure-all technofix, a vaccine. Can our collective death be ethically bypassed via medical advancements without unforeseen consequence? In what way does our desire for sustainability/survivability in the present foreclose those possibilities in the future when granted by a medical system that requires an endless supply of soon-to-be incinerated, single-use disposal, sterile plastics? I also ask, in what ways is death sustainability in disguise? My aim here is not to be provocative, nor neo-Malthusian, but to create space to consider that progress itself is a fallacy perpetuated by its own illusory machinations that may not yield any substantive, sustainable change to our modern predicament, in a way very similar to how the big three solutions to cancer provide no path towards long-lasting remediation of metabolic acidosis. I recently read an experience on Buddhist faith from someone who summarizes how I feel succinctly: "Political and legislative reforms are important, but it's not possible to legislate human nature...People's hearts need to change; our hearts need to change."<sup>47</sup> What if going forwards was actually going backwards? What if in death we live anew? *The war for your soul, that's what everyone's ignoring.*

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The world we live in, in Buddhist terms, is referred to as the saha world.<sup>48</sup> Hell is abundantly present here in all the ways: spiritually, materially, physically, climatically, etc. Lands have been rendered uninhabitable by the ongoing and unremediated atrocities of colonialism, militarism, human and nonhuman genocides, enslavement, and anthropocentrism, all of which lead us to this contemporary moment of unprecedented eco-social inequality and precarity. Ocean temperature rises, its pH becoming more

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<sup>47</sup> Edminston III, S. (2020, August). Changing Poison Into Medicine for All Humanity. *Living Buddhism*, August 2020, 36-39.

Living Buddhism, October 2020. Sheman Edminston III speaks to the insufficient nature of one's reliance on political change rather than cultural transformation.

<sup>48</sup> *Saha* is a sanskrit word for earth and also derives a root meaning "to endure." This is the land of suffering.



acidic; biodiversity declines, a result of unchecked extraction, habitat demolition, and pollution dumping. Animals are bred for flesh and slaughtered mercilessly without once seeing the light of sun or the air of freedom. And humans, too, are too-often locked in cages for the duration of their lives as a means of labor exploitation. We have lost our connection to the sacred. We are spiritually impoverished. Restoration is needed. Cultural languages and worldviews that foreground kinship and relationality have been near-extirpated in service of the individual, wage-earning meritocrat. The three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness prevail, digging us deeper and deeper into the realms of Hell with no end game in sight.

And still yet, Hell is the Land of Eternal Tranquil Light. T'ien T'ai's principle of the Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds acknowledges that even within Hell, the world of Buddhahood interdependently must also exist, confirming that each moment of life has all of the inherent qualities to transform one's world within and beyond. This is why peace activist Josei Toda wrote from prison, "Even if I should fall into Hell, it wouldn't matter to me in the least. I would simply share the correct teaching with the inhabitants there and turn it into the Land of Tranquil Light."<sup>49</sup> As stated in the Lotus Sutra, "the Buddhas wish to reveal the Buddha wisdom to all living beings."<sup>50</sup> This is what Buddhists call the Bodhisattva Vow, one in which beings choose to be reborn in the muddy saha world for the explicit purpose of transforming its poison into medicine. What if prior to this existence, each of us committed to return to this world, now, in human form, to join the grand symphony of restoring peace to the land? This same vow for the dignity of life is exhibited in the Peacemaker of the Haudenosaunee, who sensed the potential for peace even when it was nowhere near manifest:

"the Peacemaker's task was that of addressing those who lived out their anger, not avoiding them, because he saw their potential: "What do you say to a fellow who has been on countless headhunting forays? How do you convince him that a society, which has reached chaos, can be turned into a society which provides safety and hope? How do you convince him that the thirst for revenge is the source of diminishment of his own human potential?"<sup>51</sup>

Like Josei Toda, the Peacemaker found himself in a Hell of mindless bloodshed, but saw through and beyond this to the essential nature of Life. One's ability to reach into the depths of despair, at their own risk even, and still yet hold fast to a value of peace, is the heart-based medicine that our times once again demand of us. The Law of Cause

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<sup>49</sup> Ikeda, Daisaku. *Learning from Nichiren's Writings: the Teachings for Victory-Volume 1*. Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2013. Page 193.

<sup>50</sup> The Expedient Means Chapter of *The Lotus Sutra*. Watson, Burt. *The Lotus Sutra*. Columbia University Press, 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Childs, J. B. (2010). *Transcommunalism: From The Politics Of Conversion*. Temple University Press. Page 65. Quoted from John Mohawk.

and Effect pervades through Buddhist and Indigenous worldviews in such a way that both recognize revenge as merely self-sabotage in disguise.

As a scholar of power in environmentalisms, I recognize that these statements fall into a neoliberal trap that buttresses individualized responsabilization over systemic powers. I acknowledge the low-hanging critiques of a Kingian praxis of nonviolence that pose it has simply been assimilated, due to its palatability, into the hegemonic fold. I am careful here not to suggest that one can simply transcend their material sufferings as a matter of willpower, but rather to note that the Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds binds us to one another interdependently in such a way that “all things in the universe contain each other--they do not exist separately--and together they form the greater life of the macrocosm.”<sup>52</sup>

A continuum of relationality needs to be noted in any discourse of environmental affairs, particularly in the contemporary era of globalized communication and commodification that connects us materially to livelihoods in far away places. Commodification strips accountability, invisibilizing harms. Relations--with land, water, air, plants, animals, and other humans--become mediated by transactional power rather than by mutual respect and reciprocity. Because such asymmetry now exists, unmaking this is the spiritual task at hand. Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda Sensei encourages humans to become global citizens, not in the traveler-conqueror or polyglot sense, but rather, to become people of inner nobility. Such people, he argues, possess:

“(1) the wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living; (2) the courage not to fear or deny difference; but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them; and (3) the compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places.”<sup>53</sup>

Such wisdom fuses beautifully with John Brown Child's call for transcommunality. I pray for this imaginative empathy. Understanding our current existence along an eternal cycle of reincarnation allows us to do so. Nichiren Daishonin writes in his letter titled 'The Four Virtues and the Four Debts of Gratitude,' “At one time or another in the past, all men have been your father and all women, your mother. Thus, in the course of all the many lifetimes and existences you have lived through, you have come to owe a debt of gratitude to all living beings. And since this is so, you should help all of them to attain

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<sup>52</sup> Ikeda, D. (1979). *Selected Lectures on the Goshō*. Nichiren Shoshu International Center. Pg 115. This is the Buddhist principle of Dependent Origination, and I include this to demonstrate how such understandings of inherent interconnectedness span many Indigenous worldviews.

<sup>53</sup> Ikeda, Daisaku. "Thoughts on Education for Global Citizenship. Lecture presented at Teachers College." *New York, NY: Columbia University* (1996).

Buddhahood.”<sup>54</sup> Subscribing to a belief in reincarnation naturally allows one to find kinship in all of life, and as such, one can strive to help reduce beings’ suffering whenever and wherever possible. Buddhist philosophy underscores that no phenomena is exempt from the Law of Life and Death, not the sun, the planets, the stones, nor ourselves. Julio Rivera of the Peruvian Andes reflects this same sentiment in his Indigenous tradition: “In the Indian concept of life, everything is alive--the plants, the hills, the stars, the rivers. Everything is alive. And everything is our family. Even the dead are alive.”<sup>55</sup> Anishnaabe scholar Melissa Nelson remarks that water is, too, an ancestor.<sup>56</sup> Belief systems that establish kinship between and beyond life, however distant, deposit fertile grounds to cultivate imaginative empathies that curtail extractive, short-sighted, harmful behavior, both to the environment as well as to other beings, whenever possible. Reincarnation, which assumes eternal kinship, provides us with a connective tissue beyond the divisive identity politics, seeing ourselves as all related.

From the Buddhist point of view, life itself is considered to be the most sacred of all treasures. Nichiren Daishonin confirms, “every being, from the highest sage on down to the smallest mosquito or gnat, holds life to be its most precious possession. To deprive a being of life is to commit the gravest kind of sin.”<sup>57</sup> At the same time, life and death are intimately wedded together; within living bodies, dead fingernails and hairs emerge, just as organ cells continuously undergo apoptosis and regeneration, and gut bacteria emerge and wither with every meal one consumes. This approach blurs the rigid lines between life and death through relationality, and its mystery lies unprescribable solutions for finding alignment. Renowned spiritual leader of the Dagara Tribe in modern Burkina Faso, Malidoma Somé, reminds us that “death is life and life is death. The dead live while the living die. Living or dying, we have joy.”<sup>58</sup> As such, we can either engrave these values deep into our being and carry these truths within us while living in the saha world, or we can succumb to the forces of the hellish, spiritually-devoid economic paradigm that disposes of beings without recourse. I attempt to trace the overlaps in circularity between Buddhist and Indigenous worldviews, and position them in conversation with one another in hopes to remedy the collective spiritual malnourishment that I believe is the cause of our environmental and social despair.

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<sup>54</sup> Gakkai, Soka. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1999. Page 637. Nichiren Daishoni wrote this in his letter titled “Four Virtues and Four Debts of Gratitude.”

<sup>55</sup> Nelson, Melissa K., ed. *Original instructions: Indigenous teachings for a sustainable future*. Simon and Schuster, 2008. Page 264. Julio Rivera shares his perspectives on Indigenous worldviews in this chapter of *Original Instructions* called “Re-Indigenization Defined.”

<sup>56</sup> Nelson, Melissa. [Melissa Nelson]. (2014, May 15). *Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89fsH20Bh44&t=932s>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Page 667. Taken from a letter titled “Blessings of the Lotus Sutra.”

<sup>58</sup> Somé, Malidoma Patrice. *Of water and the spirit: Ritual, magic, and initiation in the life of an African shaman*. New York: Putnam, 1994. Page 66.

I would like to conclude this rumination by recounting the pervasive fear of death and the unknown. What if instead we considered the possibility of apocalypse, of collapse, of the failure of sustainability to actually bring us circular return, that which a secular sustainability overlooks with its linear rigidity? What if we instead internalized that the apocalypse is already here, has always been here, in the silenced cries of any being who has been desecrated by commodified logic? In the 'Life Span' chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha expounds, "when living beings witness the end of a kalpa / and all is consumed in a great fire, / this, my land, remains safe and tranquil, / constantly filled with heavenly and human beings...my pure land is not destroyed...".<sup>59</sup> Living in California, as each year proves an unpredictable fire season, this line speaks to my core. It presciently yokes the environmental disasters of climate change to this notion of an eternal self that transcends delineations between the visible, measurable life and the mystical, nonsubstantial death. Malidoma Somé provides us with more wisdom on the matter of fire: "[it] is the rope that links us with our real home that we abandoned when we died into being human."<sup>60</sup> Death into life. When the fire within us, our passions, our fearlessness, our fury, joins the fire beyond us, we transcend life and death to find our flightpath out of prescriptive modes of sustainability that are so eager to survive that are willing to dominate the land and other beings along the way, prioritizing certain lands and bodies over others. And in the 'Expedient Means' chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha proclaims to his disciple, "Shariputra, you should know / that at the start I took a vow, / hoping to make all persons / equal to me, without any distinction between us."<sup>61</sup> Of course no two beings are ever the same, but their essence as Life entities nonetheless makes them equally worthy of respect. "This is the holy land," Leslie Gray of the Oneida and Powhatan Nation asserts, calling our attention to the holiness of *this* land. *This land* is a dynamic affirmation of the holiness of land in *this* present moment anywhere one stands. "In fact, Aboriginal peoples of the Americas have always widely acknowledged that the earth itself is everywhere and in all parts sacred," she finishes.<sup>62</sup> All of life and all of earth is holy. Even though we may find ourselves in Hell, just like the Great Peacemaker, and just like Buddha, we must first carefully examine the Hell in our minds if we are to transform it into the Land of Tranquil

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<sup>59</sup> The "Life Span" Chapter of *The Lotus Sutra*. Watson, Burt. *The Lotus Sutra*. Columbia University Press, 1993.

<sup>60</sup> Somé, Malidoma Patrice. *Of water and the spirit: Ritual, magic, and initiation in the life of an African shaman*. New York: Putnam, 1994. Page 199.

<sup>61</sup> The "Expedient Means" Chapter of *The Lotus Sutra*. Watson, Burt. *The Lotus Sutra*. Columbia University Press, 1993.

<sup>62</sup> Nelson, Melissa K., ed. *Original instructions: Indigenous teachings for a sustainable future*. Simon and Schuster, 2008. Page 86. Leslie Gray dispels the problematic tendency to designate certain lands as more sacred than others from an Indigenous context in "Where is the Holy Land?"

Light. This is my daily prayer. Nam myoho renge kyo. Nam myoho renge kyo. Nam myoho renge kyo.

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