

PLANT AND FORGET

Communicate with a tree by practicing give-and take through breathing. The compassion you feel for the tree will make a difference, says Lama Doboom Tulku

TOI Newspaper (Speaking Tree) October 18, 2015

The main source of our problems in the world is our short-sighted greed. This is particularly true with ecological degradation. We pull out trees turning our fertile earth into a sterile desert.

When we think of our mother earth, though more than 70% of it is water, yet in ancient scriptures, it is exemplified by the name of the tree, Jambu tree, thus Jambudvipa.

If trees vanished from earth, what will remain is no more than a dreary, desolate desert.

Trees purify the air and help in sustaining life. They also provides home for many living organisms. Their shade makes a welcome resting place. They also please the eye and soothe the mind. When the heart is ablaze with fire of anger, trees bring refreshing coolness.

Vinaya scriptures are a body of Buddhist canonical texts. On the face of it, they are life style guides for those who have renounced worldly life, but they are meant to be taken as guiding instructions for monks as well as for the lay community.

Vinaya Sutra by Acharya Gunaprabha of the 5th century gives a very clear and graphic instruction for planting and caring of trees which is in fact a record of Buddha's words. I give below the passage dealing with this subject. It says:

"Planting of trees is appropriate for *Bhiksus* or monks. After planting, the nurturing of these trees should not be neglected. Regarding the period of care, if they are flowering trees they should be nurtured until flowers appear. If they are fruit trees, they should be nurtured until they bear fruits. If both of these types take longer time to bear flower or fruit, they should be nurtured for five years. One can also ask other *bhikshus* to take care of trees, for to do so is the same as care given by oneself. Regarding the watering of the trees, *bhikshus* can wash hands, feet and begging bowls near the trees. Bathing should also be done near the trees. In order to protect a tree from cold breeze, put a structure over it and make an opening in the structure. In order to protect it from the cold, place a cover on the opening. To prevent overheating in the spring, remove the cover. In the summer, in order to prevent the trees from rotting, remove the structure as well..."

Many of us tend to trees or plants. And it is known through some scientific analysis that if you say certain words repeatedly to a plant, it has a certain effect on it. We may or may not speak to them, but I certainly feel we could have some kind of communication with them. We may engage in appreciating trees and plants by observing them closely, their texture, shape, size, smell and freshness. We may show our gratitude to the trees with a small practice.

Give And Take

Stand under a shady tree, observe it carefully and think of all the benefit we get from it, directly or indirectly. Feel grateful and think how you can support its growth. Start a communication with the tree by practicing 'give and take' through breathing. Breathe in visualizing that you are taking in all the harmful substances from the tree that hinders its growth and breathe out visualizing that you have transformed the harmful waste products into good substances and are giving it back to the tree in the form of oxygen that supports life. This compassionate feeling for trees will surely make a difference and your destructive instinct will slowly fade away.

But, remember, this compassionate practice, if done without expecting anything in return, can be fruitful, not otherwise. 'Do good and forget', like squirrels who bury nuts and then forget where they hid them. Then, the trees will surely grow and we will be initiating a new kind of activity which can be considered a spiritual exercise called mindfulness.