

BUDDHIST - There is no enlightenment outside of daily life.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-)

CHRISTIAN - The only path on which we can approach God
is found in the center of daily life.

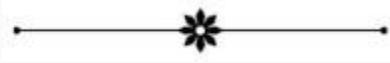
Karl Rahner (1904-1984)



A GRANDFATHER'S LETTER TO GRETA AND HER FRIENDS

I don't believe that one of these Friday Reflections has ever fallen on the fourth day of January. It is not a particularly exceptional date. Not much of any great note has happened on January 4th since 46 BCE when Julius Caesar defeated Titus Labienus in an important battle. It has, however, been designated by someone as "The National Day of Trivia." It is also the 11th day of Christmas, and in the familiar Carol there are 11 pipers piping. The recipient of all these gifts must be having a very hard time finding a place to put them!

Most of the other fourth days of January have been rather ordinary. I was born on one of them in 1931. Well, in a way it wasn't typical, because it was during the Great Depression when my parents and most other people must have longed for ordinary days to return. I seem to have grown up with this attitude which is why my favorite poems are pieces like Thomas Merton's (1915–1968) *Love Winter When The Plant Says Nothing*. And it is probably also why, like Merton, I am drawn to a contemplative life.



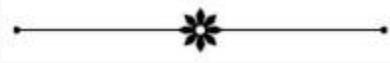
But things do happen as the new year begins. I saw a picture of a 15-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, sitting with a sad but determined face next to a sign that translated “School strike for climate.” I hope she wasn't punished for not going to school. I also hope she was joined by a lot of others who saw the sign.



The world I was born into has changed and will never be the same. The world Greta was born into is changing at a much faster rate. The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that we will have major consequences as early as 2040, more droughts, more wildfires, more poverty, more homelessness, higher temperatures, etc.

Where will action come from to counter our mistreatment of the earth? Not from the present American administration who value profit for a few over the common good of the planet and its beings.

It particularly saddened me recently that Japan seemed to follow Mr. Trump's example and removed its ban on the hunting of whales. I have friends much more knowledgeable than I, who say that the catastrophic destruction will begin in the oceans. Some believe that these vast and beautiful expanses of water are now polluted beyond repair. I assume that the challenges faced by whales are greatly increased. I have always been fascinated by these magnificent creatures. They travel up and down the coast line near where I live. Not far away whales of great length gather periodically and do seem to communicate with sounds that are particularly pleasant. Now they have become again simply prey and I am advised by my young friends especially that what is happening to these greatest of ocean creatures is also happening to the smallest.

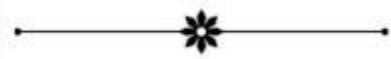


The worst thing we can do is to give up hope. My hope primarily lies in the determination and passion of our young people. When faced with the question, “*Can the planet be saved?*” they almost universally respond, “*We sure as hell are going to try!*” I just know they are going to do something helpful. The world 22 years from now, as the international

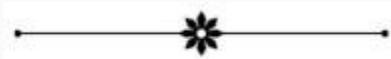
body of scientists predicts, is certainly not going to be the world I loved. Maybe it's not going to even be the world that Greta loves. But it's still going to be something that we all love!



A number of people's wayfaring spiritual journey brings them to my home, Starcross. For many of them, the paths of spirituality and ecology intersect here. Popes, poets, prophets and millions of ordinary people are beginning to recognize the ancient partnership between creation and ourselves. Unfortunately, not nearly as many of them as we need are presently involved in governmental structures.



For those of us for whom this day marks another milestone, I think the wisest thing we can contribute to those who follow is to simply to encourage them to look. I wish I could put an arm around Greta and ask her what she sees in Sweden. But I can tell you what I see. And perhaps if you happen to run into a girl who's carrying a sign that says, *SKOLSTREJK FÖR KLIMATET* you can share these words.



My cat Tigger has come in for the day and has arranged himself a few feet from me in the sunlight. He seems most happy. Looking out the window beyond him I see the kitchen garden filled with all sorts of things that will end up as a salad. They aren't supposed to be growing at this time of year but somehow they are, thanks to the efforts of my friend Lance and a number of young helpers. The birds love to walk around the plants perhaps thinking of more adventuresome summer activities. Beyond this is a pine forests with a thick layer of pine needles. There is also a little tea plant that I planted years ago. It hasn't grown an inch! I've come to the conclusion that it is very happy just as it is.



Beyond the pines are rows of olive trees. They dance in the slightest breeze. Silver on the bottom, green on the top of each leaf. For me they are also history teachers. They have survived in the most incredibly difficult places. I have seen some in the Middle East that were hundreds of years old. And I can remember a few weeks ago when ours were harvested and I knew that people in many parts of the world were doing exactly the same thing and in the same way.

There are many birds out today. It is a cloudless day and the air is very fresh. Many of these birds survived the great wildfires to the north of us and came here, hopefully to live. They have different colors, different personalities, different songs, and probably different dreams. But they have found ways of living together. Right now a flock of ravens is playing in the wind high above. And above even them is a large bird. It may be an eagle. She or he does not come often, but this seems a good day for visiting.

Two little boys are playing. They don't speak the same language but that doesn't seem to matter. A wise old dog watches over them.



As I raise my head and look into the distance, I see the forested horizon. I love the trees. A friend gave me a book entitled *The Secret Lives of Trees*, which taught me that there is much more to the community of trees than I had ever suspected. I'm afraid the future is not very hopeful for the trees that surround me and provide a horizon.



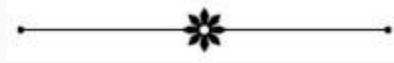
I think, and hope, that there will always be some kind of horizon. I feel we desperately need it. The Japanese poet and priest Basho (1644–1694) wrote often of horizons. He felt that our task in life was to move from horizon to horizon and there was no end to that process. But one of Basho's most moving poems for me was translated by my friend Clifford Edwards. It warns us not to be so fascinated by far horizons that we forget the ordinary miracles at our

feet.

On the mountain path,

*what is this special thing?
A simple violet.*

There is no violet to be seen here but surprisingly at my feet a little bush has produced a white rose — a symbol of hope.



Despite the difficulties we face, may this be a blessed year for all of us. As Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) wrote,

*And you suddenly know: It was here!
You pull yourself together
and there stands an irrevocable year of
anguish and vision and prayer.*

Like the Roman god Janus, let us not only look backward — but also forward!

Brother Toby

PS. Follow the link to see Greta Thunberg's speech to the UN Climate Change Conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFkQSGyeCWg>