




# Sustainability & Impermanence: A Buddhist Perspective

**CBODN 2015**

April 24, 2015

Presenter: Tip Fallon



# Welcome

- ❖ What brought you here today?
- ❖ What are you interested in getting out of this session?

# Today we will explore:

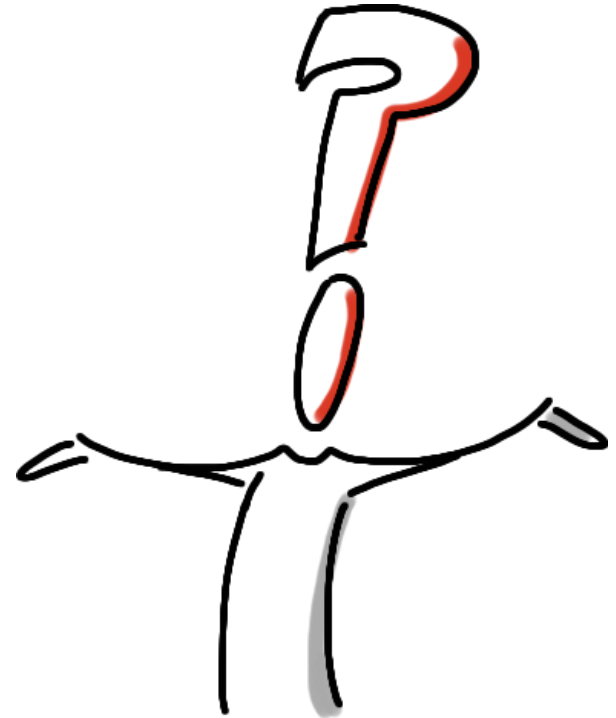


- What we mean by “sustainability”
- What we try to sustain, and why
- Buddhist principles that can inform how we approach sustainability

# What we mean by “sustainability”

*Discuss in pairs:*

What does “sustainability”  
mean to you?



# Sustainability can refer to

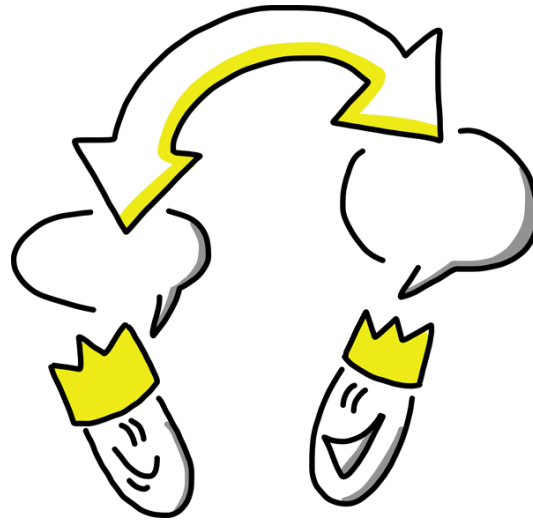
- The ability to survive and continue to exist
- The ability to adapt and innovate
- Processes that ensure sufficient resources are available for future generations and are never totally depleted

# Paradox of sustainability

If survival requires change, and we want something to be sustainable – that is, able to survive –

- What exactly are we trying to sustain?
- How do we know which parts to hold on to, and which we can subject to change?
- If we are trying to hold on to something the way it is, how do we know we're not slowing down its natural lifecycle of change?

# What we try to sustain



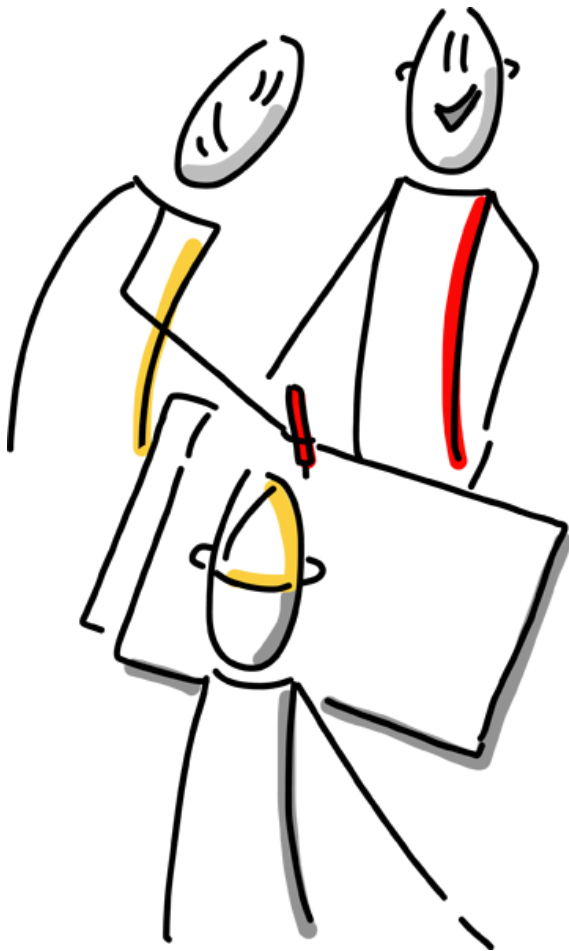
Discuss with your partner something you want to sustain.

1. What do you want to sustain?
2. How long would it ideally sustain for?
3. What parts of it might change?
4. Which parts do you most want to stay the same?

# Things we try to sustain

- Our self – mind, body, consciousness, ego  
*SURVIVAL!*
- Profits –  
*Indefinite economic growth in a closed system, please!*
- Environment
  - Reduce environmental footprint
- People and other species
  - Relationships, communities, rights & dignities of other beings
- Our impact
- Our stuff





## Case study

*See handout*

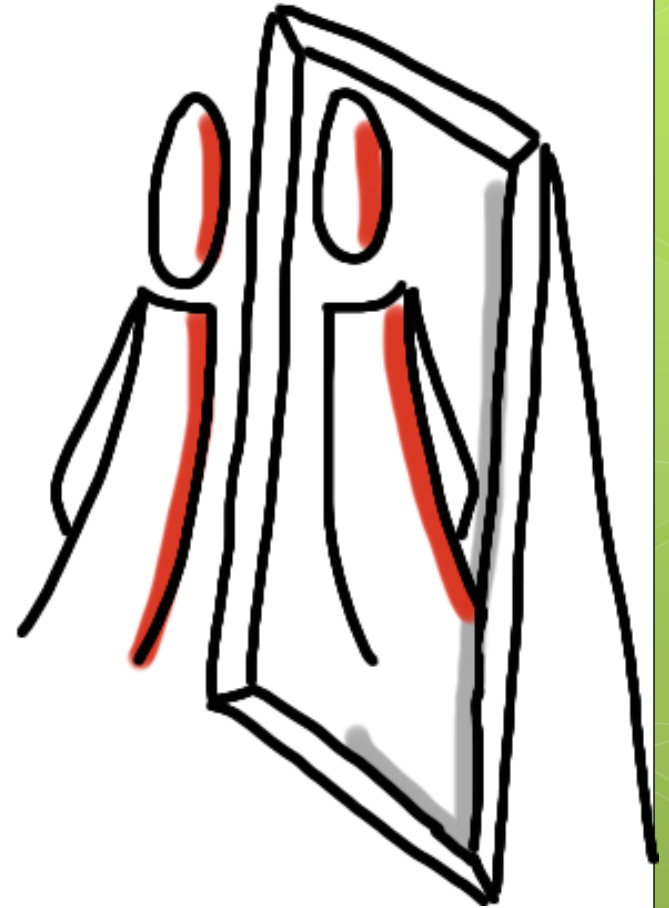
Looking at its history,  
was this company  
sustainable?

- How so, or how not?

# Why we try to sustain

*Silent reflection:*

Why do you try to sustain things?



We try to sustain things  
because of attachment.



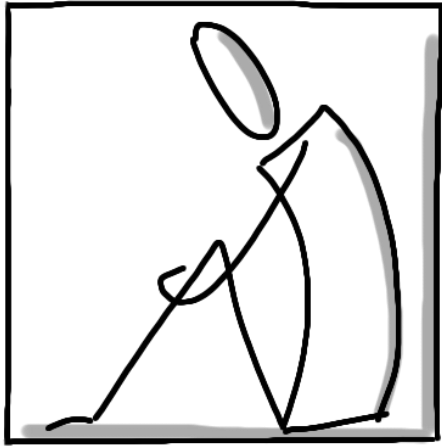
enter, Buddhism



# How sustainability serves us

- Can lead to longer survival of us and other species
- Can lead to better quality of life
- Opportunity to make a positive impact on others and the planet





## Sustainability's “shadow side”

- It's based on our attachment; and attachment to anything, even something “good” can lead to suffering
- Sustainability is often about external goals (profits, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emission, longevity of a company); our internal lived experience is mostly ignored
- Even if we achieve the external outcomes we want, they will change over time anyway; and achieving them does not guarantee any improvement in our lived experience

# A Few Buddhist Teachings

- ✧ Suffering exists in life.
- ✧ Suffering has a cause, and can be ended.
- ✧ Suffering is caused by desire and attachment.
- ✧ Everything is impermanent.
- ✧ Attachment to things inevitably leads to suffering.
- ✧ To end suffering, reduce desire and attachment.
  - ✧ *How?* Practice the Noble 8-fold path.

# Noble 8-fold path

- 1) Right understanding
- 2) Right thought (intention)
- 3) Right speech
- 4) Right action
- 5) Right livelihood
- 6) Right effort
- 7) Right mindfulness
- 8) Right concentration

# Paradox of Sustainability and Buddhism

By following the 8-fold path, and letting go of our *desire for sustainability*, sustainability naturally manifests in ways that it can not when we pursue it from a place of desire and attachment.



# Open discussion

- What resonates with you?
- What questions does this bring up?
- What possible next steps come to mind from this discussion?

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