

Fracturing Mother Earth, Fracturing Me

By Jan Goss



Monastic leading a walking meditation near the fracking site in Yorkshire, August 2017

photo by Wouter Verhoeven

In May 2017, I became an activist and visited my local fracking site near Blackpool in Lancashire, four miles from my home in neighbouring Lytham. Despite local people and councillors voting unanimously against the invasion of the fracking industry, the government imposed this fossil fuel industry on the local community and the rest of England.

Over six months I witnessed turmoil, anger, hurt, violence, despair, compassion, humour and love that went along with fracking and the stand against it. On one hand, I was encouraged by the people who felt deeply for Mother Earth, who realised our complete dependence on her and who were willing to put their bodies on the line for her. On the other hand, I despaired at the lack of understanding and violence of those who were, and still are, exploiting the Earth when many viable alternatives in the form of renewable energy sources exist.

The extent of the police presence and their strong-arm tactics—and their facilitation of this industry rather than their keeping everyone safe—shocked me. The police pushed and kettled and dragged people; elderly men and women were “rugby tackled” to the ground; young women were pulled from vehicles and thrown onto the road; a young disabled ex-naval officer was tipped from his wheelchair on numerous occasions; and an eighty-six-year-old woman was dragged across the road and left on the kerb. Near misses happened as lorries entered the site at speed for fear of a “lorry surfing” campaigner boarding their vehicle and stopping them in transit. A private security guard, unable to control his anger, restrained a peaceful Earth protector’s throat.

On my first visit on a hot sunny day in May, I found myself caught in a maelstrom of police officers and their vans with the busy road closed to allow service vehicles to come and go from the site. The way some of the protestors spoke to the police with unkindness and with little or no regard for their feelings, the way the police treated the protestors with shoving and goading and the way everyone continued to exploit Mother Earth made me sad. I could see the cycle of cause and effect, one unkind behaviour prompting another.

As an instinctive response, I engaged in walking meditation under the shade of my umbrella and chanted “*Namo Avalokiteshvara.*” At one point I became surprised at how loudly and confidently I was doing this. It was a spontaneous response to the anger and violent attitudes surrounding me. I walked and chanted in front of the police line and past their vehicles. I felt a detachment and simultaneously a deep connection, detached from the fray and connected to Mother Earth and all of our vulnerabilities. I continued for a couple of hours, managing to be present but not getting caught in the precipitating anger.

On subsequent visits, a few police officers approached me and asked what I was chanting. Others commented on my peace and one dubbed me “the world’s most peaceful protestor.” The police were mostly respectful of my practice, intrigued enough to ask me questions, and allowed me to walk in mindfulness. With effortless effort, my practice engaged those around me in more peaceful dialogue.

The summer became consumed with anti-fracking activism as I also volunteered to coordinate a wellbeing programme to offer to those engaged in a month-long period of intensive activism, including lock-ons (people who blocked the roads in peaceful protest by locking themselves into multi-layered devices that required special cutting equipment to remove them) and “lorry surfing” campaigners who gallantly stood atop heavy goods vehicles, sometimes for days at a time. During this period, I worked with taking care of anger, being compassionate and being in touch with Mother Earth.

A women’s “call for calm” began on 19th July and is still a regular Wednesday morning event at the fracking site. Women gathered, wearing white, to walk together and stand in silence for fifteen minutes at the entrance of the site. We were encouraged to take the microphone afterwards and speak from our heart and personal experience—a “pop-up” Dharma sharing. The first week I read page eight of Thay’s book *Love Letter to the Earth*. Thay’s words touched the hearts of all present, including the police and security guards. People were encouraged to know that our teacher