

## The Earth Treasure Vase Healing Project by The Gratefulness Team

The Gaia Mandala Global Healing Community is a growing circle of people from around the world who are hearing the call of the Earth to wake up and engage with the great work of our time: to participate in restoring balance and harmony to the web of life. The Earth Treasure Vase Global Healing Project lies at the heart of this community - planting clay vases filled with offerings of protection and healing around the world.

The project's Gaia Mandala Sangha — a spiritual community grounded in Buddhist tradition but open to all — exists as an in-person and online community with regular meditation and retreat offerings, including a monthly full moon meditation and opportunities to participate in stewarding Earth Treasure Vases. Founder Cynthia Jurs, spoke with us to share more about the history of the Gaia Mandala Global Healing Community, the Earth Treasure Vase Project, and the place of gratitude in sacred activism.

What sparked the founding/creation of the Gaia Mandala Global Healing Community and the Earth Treasure Vase Project?

In 1990, I had the opportunity to meet a 106-year-old Buddhist Lama living in a cave in a remote part of Nepal. As I was walking up the highest mountains in the world, I realized that I had a chance to actually ask a question of the old wise man in the cave. As I was walking, I contemplated what I should ask him that would be of benefit, not just for me, but for all of us — because most people don't have the opportunity to ask a question of a 106-year-old Lama in a cave.

I thought about it really deeply and what came to me was, what can we do to bring healing and protection to the Earth? This has always been a theme, a thread, a calling of mine because I love this Earth. I love life. And even back then, 30 years ago, we were already starting to see the effects of imbalance in the world. I lived with him for several weeks and eventually had the chance to ask him this question. He was already melting back into all it is and he died the next year. But when we spoke he knew exactly what was going on and asked me many questions. The first thing he said to me, "Even just one person can bring benefit to a whole area around where they live."

Then he continued, "You need to get some Earth Treasure Vases and put them in the ground. They will do that work." I didn't know what he meant but he explained. These little clay pots that come from the Tibetan tradition originated in the eighth century as a practice to bring healing to the Earth. They are filled with prayers and symbolic offerings that are intended to bring balance and protection to a whole area around where they're planted or buried.

Earth Treasure Vase ready for burial (Avebury, UK)

How does the project address a shared need (for a certain population, society, etc.)?

It's very potent medicine. When the Lama first told me about the Earth Treasure Vases, my rational mind was kind of going, right, how is that really possible — that a little clay pot filled with prayers and symbolic offerings is going to deal with the kinds of issues that are happening now. One of the things I was very concerned about (and still am) is the presence of nuclear weapons and radioactive waste and how these substances are affecting the web of life. What do we do about this, and so many other things, that seem so insurmountable?

So the rational mind was having this conversation. And the other part of me was going, "Okay, where do I get these vases, because we have to do everything we possibly can." The Lama directed us to go to another monastery whose abbot makes them. That abbot asked me how many vases I would like. I didn't know what to say — the world is a very big place.

I said, "How about 25?" And he said, "Oh, sure, fine! We will make them for you." He understood that we were (and are) facing unique circumstances in the world today that invite a strong response. So he suggested that they collect sacred substances to mix into the clay when the pots were made — substances and relics and medicines that connect back to the very beginning of Tibetan Buddhism and all the lineages.

Earth Treasure Vase Ceremony inside the temple at Tolu Tharling with abbot, Lama Ngawang Tsultrim Rinpoche in front (Nepal)

The vases were made and consecrated and given to us to fill and seal and bury ourselves, which is very unusual because these practices are usually done in specific ways by the Lamas behind the closed doors of monasteries. But they gave them to us and said, "Just put them in the ground, they'll do the work." I think they knew that this practice had to travel far and wide and to realize its medicine for this age we had to fill them ourselves, we had to make the practice our own.

How do you see the project as being related to grateful living?

Each of us in our own way is dedicated to being a holy vessel for global healing and collective awakening. We cultivate transformational practices personally and practice sacred activism collectively for the benefit of all. We listen deeply, open fully, make relations with each other, and make offerings to Mother Earth. In love with life, we recognize our relationship of interbeing and give thanks for the opportunity of this precious human life to wake up and offer ourselves as vessels for healing in all the ways that are called for in these times.

Former child soldiers with ex-General Bethelson practicing mindfulness in peace building (Liberia)

The impact of the vases in each location is different. Each location has a different need, a

different prayer and a different response. In Liberia, the vase was in response to healing from war. But in different locations, it takes different forms. We can't predict what the impact will be. But things happen. I took a treasure vase to the coast of Oaxaca in Mexico after a terrible hurricane had completely devastated the region.

We went to bury it in a place called Punta Cometa, which is a point of land that's sacred to all of the Indigenous people of that area. We walked all the way out to the very point where the land turned into rock and went into the ocean but we hadn't seen a place to bury the vase. When we reached the point where we could go no further, I took the vase out of my backpack, held it up, rang the bell and said some prayers. We opened ourselves to guidance. And at that very moment a whale breached right off the point of the Punta Cometa! And then another whale breached.

They were close enough that the spray hit us and the vase. And in that moment, I remembered that there was a place back where there was actually dirt that you could dig into. I felt this sense of, "Oh, yes, it is there." So we turned around, and as we were walking back in the direction we came, I looked upon that area where there was Earth and I saw a path that was lit up with light. The path ended right at the base of a huge Saguaro cactus.

Most of the trees had been blown over by the hurricane. This cactus was still standing. We thought the ground beneath it was going to be really hard and had brought a shovel to dig, expecting hard rock. But we dug down and the ground opened like butter. We dug with our hands, and laid the vase in the hole and covered it. The vases are supposed to be buried in such a way that nobody would ever know that they're there. So we covered our tracks, and left.

About five years later, I returned with my husband to visit. In the late afternoon we walked to where the vase was buried to do a meditation at sunset. We sat down, and all of a sudden people started arriving. There were groups of people in twos, threes, fours and ones. They were all quietly walking out, very mindfully, to the Punta, to the very location of the vase, to watch the sunset. It had become a tradition that people came to watch the sunset and meditate. So we were all there in this quiet, beautiful meditation. And then everybody just turned around and went back. We were amazed.

Punta Cometa sunset meditation (Oaxaca)

How does the project inspire an ethic of humanity - values of love, kindness, compassion, etc.?

There's been some very tangible experiences that have come out of the project, like our peacebuilding work in Liberia. But mostly the impact is on a subtle level. The vases definitely have an effect on the people who participate. In the process of working with the treasure vases, people begin to realize that we are holy vessels, filled with offerings, filled with prayers, filled with intentions of deep caring for this life. The practice awakens our caring and our compassion and our love and our gratefulness. From our deepest heart of hearts arise the ways that we are each called to turn our prayers for the Earth into action.

Earth Treasure Vase group (Liberia)

What inspires people to participate?

When I was given the vases and told to simply plant them in the ground, I thought, Really, how does this happen? It took me a while to accept the assignment — it was very overwhelming so I put them away.

Then in the mid-nineties, we started having raging wildfires and drought where I live in New Mexico. I was studying the dharma and practicing meditation deeply during this time. (I'm now a Dharma Teacher in the Zen tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, and a Lama in the Tibetan tradition.) I realized we needed to bring out the Earth Treasure Vases and start working with them. Our little sangha (spiritual practice community) had enough training to know what to do and it was clear we should not wait any longer. So I called a group together and pulled out the vases.

But we really didn't know exactly what to do. So we felt our way, praying and making offerings. I had researched the Earth Treasure Vase practice from the traditional point of view, but I was also really interested in how to make the practice our own — to make the traditional offerings, but also to invite people to be free to find something meaningful for themselves.

People brought such meaningful things to put in the vases as offerings as a heartfelt response to what was happening in different parts of the world where the vases were intended to go. And people were inspired to suggest places for the vases to go that needed healing and protection. We left them open so that when we arrived in the places where the vases would be buried, we could invite local people in those places to make their own offerings. And then it really came alive because instead of us bringing a practice from some other culture that had no meaning to people in Africa, Australia or the Americas, they were invited to make their own connection to the vases being buried in their land. People care so much about the places they love and about what's happening to our world. The Earth Treasure Vases gave us all a chance to pour our hearts out. This leads to action.

Earth Treasure Vase burial in the flint hills of Kansas (U.S.)

What is the lasting impact? What are the ripple effects of this sacred work?

We started working within our bioregion in New Mexico, which is defined by the Rio Grande River that runs from Southern Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico. We embraced this region as the center of what would become the Earth Treasure Vase Global Healing Mandala. We took one vase to the source of the Rio Grande River, one to the mouth of the Rio Grande at the Gulf of Mexico, one to the top of Mount Baldy above Santa Fe, and one on top of Mount Chicoma, which is called Sikamu to the Tewa people who are the original First Nations People of this land.

These burial locations represented the four directions of the mandala. The center of the mandala was identified as a cave above the Los Alamos National Laboratory, in New Mexico, the birthplace of the atomic bomb. The legacy of nuclear weapons and the prayer to end war has been a thread through the whole project. It felt very appropriate to bring a vase there.

From this beginning, the project began to slowly go out in different directions, all around the whole Earth. We have never been able to decide in a linear way where the vases should go because the need is everywhere. So we had to allow something so much larger than ourselves to guide us.

We realized that the vases needed to be taken into the commons, buried in places that are for all of us. Eventually there was a feeling that we need to try to embrace the whole planet and take them to every continent, as far and wide as we possibly can.

### Earth Treasure Vase circle (Congo)

After completing the original assignment of burying 30 vases in 2013, I received a second generation of 40 more vases about half the size of the originals that were made at the same time. When we are done 70 vases will have been placed all around the whole Earth. We have 14 on the altar, still awaiting their destinations.

After accomplishing many, many of the Earth Treasure Vases myself, I'm now passing the practice on to others who would like to steward a vase themselves. We have an Earth Treasure Vase Stewardship Council whose job it is to look deeply at where to take the final ones to complete the mandala.

Through our nonprofit organization, Alliance for the Earth, we are turning our prayers into action in tangible ways. After bringing an Earth Treasure Vase to Liberia and burying it in the worst-fought region of the war, we forged long term relationships with former combatants, ex-child soldiers, and the women who stopped the war. Our Liberian partners founded the Peace Hut Alliance for Conflict Transformation (PHACT) to foster peace and teach mindfulness as a tool for conflict resolution and trauma healing. This work for peace and healing is an example of what can come from a little clay pot filled with prayers and offerings. In Liberia, where daily life is a constant challenge we practice an on-the-ground engaged activism that fosters compassion in action.

We are also working in Nepal to rebuild and restore Tolu Tharling Temple, the spiritual birthplace of the Earth Treasure Vase Global Healing Project and the seat of the Lamas who gave us this practice. This beautiful ancient monastery was destroyed by the 2014 earthquake and we are committed to helping bring it back to life as a spiritual home for all who are called to protect such a rare and sacred refuge in our world.

### Tolu Tharling Monastery (Nepal)

How is the project responding to the shared moment at hand (given the global pandemic, the reckoning with racism in the US, the climate crisis, etc.)? How has your work evolved to adapt to changing needs in the world?

As long as human beings are living on this Earth, I think there will be the need for healing and protection for the Earth. We'll never be done. The work goes on. There are still treasure vases that have yet to be dedicated. And there are quite a few that are in the process of being taken to where they will be buried. Every full moon, we do a meditation to direct our prayers to what is going on in the world or wherever a treasure vase is being taken.

In response to the need to address racism in America, we have dedicated a treasure vase to Healing the US. We don't yet know where this vase will be buried. But I trust the process, and know that as it unfolds, it's destiny will become clear. The vases are like living beings. They tell us where they want to go. The treasure vases are not political tools, they are here in response to issues that need healing — social justice, war, environmental issues. Another treasure vase has been dedicated to Antarctica. We don't know how we will get it to Antarctica, but someone who is very committed has come forward to steward it there.

The practice is evolving in other ways as well. One, with the realization that we are each holy vessels, we see we don't necessarily need a little clay pot, we just need to get in touch with what we love and care about and pour our hearts out. The other way the project is evolving is that we are experiencing the global Earth Treasure Vase mandala coming to life as a whole. We have always felt the aliveness of the little holy vessels filled with prayers and intentions, but now it's as if all the individual locations around the world have been joined into a planetary web of shared intention on behalf of Gaia and are participating with us and with Her in the work of restoration and healing that is the work of our time.

What are some of the obstacles that arise for the project? How are they addressed?

I have a treasure vase that I'm working with now that's been dedicated to Delphi in Greece, which is the seat of the Delphic Oracle, a place where it was said the wisdom of Gaia came up and out of the Earth and spoke to the priestesses that were in charge of that temple. I was planning to take the vase there with a group this fall, but because of COVID, we can't go.

So one obstacle is travel. Not knowing exactly how we will get the vases to the places that they need to go. But the project evolves as new people get involved, taking this practice where it is needed. New ways of accomplishing the vases are being revealed.

It's also been challenging to go to wild and remote places without prior experience, hurling myself into the world with this sacred offering and hoping people will understand and be open. I went to the Democratic Republic of Congo with one of the treasure vases. A vase was clearly drawn to the heart of Africa, but wondered if it was safe in Congo. Finally I realized that because of the connection between the rape of women in Congo — which is unprecedented there— and the rape of the Earth for its natural resources — I HAD to take a vase to Congo. I risked a lot to go into one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman and I went having only one contact whom I had never met — a woman named Neema Namadamu, who is now the founder of an organization called Hero Women Rising, and a world leader representing the women of Congo.

### Gazing into an Earth Treasure Vase (Congo)

Taking the vase to Congo and doing ceremonies with many women and praying for women's empowerment, it was my dream to bring the vase into the forest where the Pygmy people live. They are one of the oldest Indigenous cultures on Earth and these people hold incredible knowledge, but as is the case in so many places, they have been

tragically oppressed and are barely surviving.

Gratefully, the Pygmy people received the vase, and together, we buried it in the forest. Traditionally, they are the forest guardians. I had spoken to them about the preciousness of their rainforests, the second largest on Earth, and how the oxygen that the trees generate in Congo, is what keeps the planet in balance, generating clean air for us all to breathe. Realizing the importance of stopping the deforestation in Congo, Neema helped to start a program for the women in the rural Indigenous parts of Congo to plant trees.

The project has taken everything I have — all of my resources and so much more. And it goes on and on. The work will never be done. I have given my life to this. I think the biggest, hardest thing is just that it feels sometimes like we haven't really made very much progress. But then I see the incredible beauty of this Earth once more and am re-inspired to remember that the times are calling for us to wake up together.

How does gratefulness inspire you to make change in the world?

This work, this practice, this calling, has awakened a feeling of gratefulness in me that has only gotten stronger and stronger as I have gone on. The beauty of life on Earth, this web of life that is so miraculous and so filled with wisdom, the innate wisdom of nature, the nature of life and how diverse and beautiful it is, fills me with humility and awe. I feel so grateful for the opportunity of this precious life to participate in the creative unfolding of life on Earth.

Because bottom line, each and every prayer and intention makes a difference. Each and every little thing that is put into one of these vases is an offering. And the vase itself is an offering to the whole Earth, to Gaia. The practice of giving is in response to the gratitude that we feel. When we are in touch with the beauty and preciousness of life, we naturally want to give back.

How does the project plan to grow?

Every full moon we do a guided meditation that anyone can participate in. Now, we have between three and four thousand people who are signed up. They don't all participate every month, but they get the recordings. So this little community that started in my living room is now a world-wide global healing community.

When I do the full moon meditation, I see all the Earth Treasure Vase locations forming a mandala, like a web of light. As I mentioned, recently the mandala began to feel as if it was coming to life as a whole. The more vases we have buried in the ground, the more it feels like the Earth is responding, not just in each location, but all together as one.

When I buried the last of the original treasure vases in Australia I had a very powerful experience of placing that vase in the ground (its happened in a couple of other locations around the world) and when it went in, I felt the energy of all the prayers held inside that little clay pot radiating out into the Earth and connecting with all the other locations. It was a very powerful experience of sensing the whole mandala coming to life and responding.

## Earth Treasure Vase burial (Australia)

In Australia the Aboriginal people talk about the “songlines” that are like “energetic highways” connecting places. I think there’s kind of an alchemy with the vases: everyone who’s part of the project around the world — thousands of people in Africa, Australia, America, and everywhere in between — have poured their hearts filled with prayers as offerings into these little clay pots. And that’s what is planted like a seed. It really is as if these intentions are coming to life and growing and sprouting in different ways.

## Welcome to Country by Aboriginal Elder Aunty Margaret Katherine (Australia)

If you could share one message about this project and gratefulness, what would it be?

When we cultivate awareness through our shared experience in prayer, our gratitude feeds the spirit that is contributing to the change in the world. This is how we give strength to the work of our times, for the healing that is called for. I know it feels like a pretty big mess, but it also feels like we’re on the edge of something really amazing. So we need to stay focused on that and give it all we’ve got. We each have a profound gift to give the world.

To learn more about the Gaia Mandala Global Healing Community, the Earth Treasure Vase project (including the locations of the vases that have been buried), and Alliance for the Earth, visit the website: [gaiamandala.net](http://gaiamandala.net)

To learn about other Grateful Changemakers, visit: [Grateful News](#)