

I couldn't help but laugh at the idea of a Buddhist monk with secret yearnings to be an accountant.

'I gave up my job when they turned down my plan to shift to an environmental accounting method. I won't bore you with the details.'

'I know all about costing social and environment impacts.'

'You do?'

'I took on the Buddhist Centre's accounts a few years ago to cheer myself up, and I adopted the triple bottom line method – every project we run is assessed on social, environmental and financial impacts. So you won't bore me.' He nodded at me encouragingly, so I confided in him a little. It's a rare thing to find someone interested in the subject.

'I gave it up to do the Green Garden consultancy which I loved, but then my old company decided that they would give Costing for Nature accounting a go and asked me back. I feel I have to do it now, as it would make such a difference.'

'Will it though?'

'What! How can you say that?' I felt like he'd punched me in the stomach. The sudden high I'd experienced when I at last found someone who appreciated the value of environmental accounting disappeared in an instant. I'd dismissed the XR protestor because yes, he knew about climate change but what did he know of accounting methods? But this Buddhist monk accountant chap should know better.

'The fact is that unless you measure something and add it up and include it in the costings, it is, to all respects and purposes, invisible in business terms. It's obvious that once we measure and cost impacts such as the carbon costs of activities, it will revolutionise how decisions are made.'

Samudrapati nodded, wisely not attempting to interrupt my rant. He gave me a moment to check if I was finished. I wasn't.

'In fact, to put it even more strongly, I can't see how any real progress could be made without Costing for Nature accounting.' I drained my cup of herbal tea too quickly and spluttered. I knew I was losing my cool, but couldn't help myself. 'I mean, you said, you use it yourself, you must see the value.' My knock-out blow delivered. I'd made my case and sat back.

After another moment's pause, he nodded again.

'In the business context it's different. It wouldn't work simply to measure the carbon footprint and offset it, they'd use that as license to continue to emit – you must see that.'

That was what the XR protestor had said.

'But it's a necessary first step. Surely something is better than nothing?'

'Not if it means you think you've done enough. It's like if you had Reiki treatment thinking it will cure cancer, when what you really need is surgery. If it stops you

seeking a solution that will actually work, it's worse than doing nothing. You have to do what's necessary.'

'It's easy to point out the problems, what about the solutions?'

'I'd go with a set carbon budget.'

'A carbon budget?'

'A limit, an actual ration they have to work within that is consistent with them achieving net zero carbon.'

Samudrapati was impressive. He'd been unfazed by my outburst, he'd made his case with calmness and authority. I had to concede.

'You truly are the Lord of all Wisdom.'

'Don't say that' he laughed uneasily, 'it always makes me feel like a complete fool.'

Fool! Wisdom! What was it the Wizard had said? The answer to my dilemma lies in the fool, who is often the wise one.

'I'm envious,' said Samudrapati, innocent of the plot I was hatching. 'I'd love your job. It would be absolutely perfect.'