If my understanding is correct, his meaning was not that no one should be rich. It was that if we attach ourselves to riches to the point that we exclude more pressing concerns, we may well cause ourselves a lot of difficulties.

What if we don't really understand this "I" and what its true purpose is? What if we kill the planet filling our desires and then discover that that's not what we were here for? Isn't this worth stopping to figure out?

There is a poem from the Chogye funeral ceremony. The congregation recites it together. It's called "The Human Route," and it goes:

Coming empty-handed, going empty-handed—that is human.
When you are born, where do you come from?
When you die, where do you go?
Life is like a floating cloud which appears.
Death is like a floating cloud which disappears.
The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.
Life and death, coming and going, are also like that.
But there is one thing which always remains clear.
It is pure and clear, not depending on life and death.

Then what is the one pure and clear thing?

One cold, cloudy day in mid-January, I'm standing at one end of the country's largest farmer's market, in New York City's Union Square. I'm looking at the throngs of people weaving from stand to stand. One stand sells apples, one sells eggs, one sells vegetables the likes of which I've never seen before. Lots of stands sell the same thing as the stand right next to them.

Which vendor is better? How are you supposed to work your way

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through this crazy maze? I ponder a vegetable called a rutabaga, which looks vaguely like a brain tumor and wonder: Even if you buy this stuff, what on earth do you do with it?

Since the project began, I've avoided take-out containers and food packaging by buying from Integral Yoga's bulk bins, but essentially the grocery-store experience is just the same. You decide what you want; you go buy it (the only change being that you take your own containers and muslin bags). In this way, I can get peanut butter, bread, pasta, rice, tropical fruits and vegetables, and just about anything else I want.

Standing in the cold at the farmer's market, being jostled by the crowd, I'm thinking about how I barely know how to cook anything that requires more than plunging something into boiling water. I'm mourning the coming end of our regimen of peanut butter sandwiches.

I walk along. Because it's January and the farmer's market contains nothing but food grown locally, there are no tomatoes and no lettuce. What there is, is a whole lot of cabbage and root vegetables and apples.

I get home. From my cloth bag I empty onto the kitchen counter turnips, some cheese, some eggs, some apples, and some cabbage. Now what do I do? Michelle and Isabella will be home in a few hours, expecting dinner. And so begins the sustainable-eating phase of the project.

I'd thought that sustainable eating would be a gimme. Like it would just be a matter of continuing to traipse over to Integral Yoga. I figured sustainable eating just meant buying organic, which is all Integral stocks anyway. All I had to do in the food phase, I'd imagined, since organic is generally more expensive, was throw money at the problem.

From my cloth bag I empty onto the kitchen counter turnips, some cheese, some eggs, some apples, and some cabbage. Now what do I do?

In return I'd get the promise that there were *almost* no pesticides or herbicides on the produce (fifty-seven

different agricultural chemicals may be used, according to the USDA organic standard). I'd also be rewarded with less pollution than from conventional farming, the promise that there would be no antibiotics or bovine growth hormones in our milk, and the hope, therefore, that Isabella would not be developing breasts at age ten.

But no.

It turns out that, unlike in the no-trash and no-carbon-producing-transportation phases, I would not be pioneering the sustainable-eating phase. There were lots of folks who had already given this aspect of our lifestyle redesign plenty of thought. And in their set, anyone with any cojones at all who wants to eat sustainably doesn't let himself off the hook by changing labels, even if the new label says "organic."

People who are really into sustainable eating take it a step further and only eat seasonal food produced within a truck ride of their home—the "local food" movement. That is why I had forced myself through the farmer's market ordeal and now had to figure out how to cook something that Michelle and Isabella would actually eat.

I was kidding myself to think I could trust organic to stand up to no-impact standards. With corporations like the cigarette company Philip Morris and the processed-food mega-giants H. J. Heinz and Sara Lee scrambling to buy up as much of the $17.7 billion organic market as they possibly can, what does "organic" even mean? Yes, it does equate with fewer toxins, but to what extent is a citizen supposed to trust real environmental stewardship to these corporate giants, or even to the USDA?

I read that the USDA, in April 2004, at the prompting of large food processors, wanted to allow farms to retain the organic seal even if they used animal growth hormones, fed cattle nonorganic fishmeal, or sprayed certain kinds of pesticides. The USDA backed down only after intense consumer complaints.

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That's when I heaved a sigh, admitted that I'd have to do better, and started plugging the phrase "sustainable eating" into Google and scrolling through websites like Locavores.com and Ethicurean.com. My work, I discovered, would be more than cut out for me. I was—damn it—really going to have to learn to cook. And not just pasta. What I'd have to deal with was, yes, fresh food from the farmer's market.

I was all the more horrified when it turned out that there were a couple of real local food hard-asses out there, a pair of authors from Vancouver named Alisa Smith and James McKennan who committed themselves to eating only food produced within a hundred miles of their home for a year. They had achieved Internet cult status. They'd already set what, to me, seemed like a terrifyingly high standard for no-impact eating.

Agriculture uses a full 17 percent of the oil in the United States.

I bit the bullet. I called the publisher of their forthcoming book and got Alisa's e-mail address. We swapped a couple of messages and, finally, we talked on the phone.

The hundred-mile-diet project, Alisa told me, began because of the concerns she and James had about the sustainability of our food system. In North America, she told me, the average distance food travels from farm to plate is roughly 2,000 miles. As one ridiculous example, strawberry imports in California peak just as strawberries are coming into season there—which is ironic to me, since the New York market, in turn, is flooded with California strawberries just as they come into season here. Agriculture, it turns out, uses a full 17 percent of the oil in the United States, which correlates to 17 percent of our oil-related greenhouse-gas emissions.

As I talked with Alisa, I had two feelings. One was the feeling of coming home. I hadn't realized how alone I had felt with this project until now. Talking to Alisa, to someone who shared my concerns and the desire to find both a more satisfying way of life and a way that was kinder to the planet, made me feel like the ugly duckling finally

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