

Caring for the Future



Randolph's Spiritual Quest and Search for Meaning

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The Travels of Randolph the Wise

Randolph the Wise sat in his chair, scratched his old grey head, and thought about the very big question.

“What *really* matters?” he asked the empty room in a deep, booming voice. As usual, there were no other voices to answer him.

The question ‘what *really* matters?’ had been puzzling Randolph the Wise very much. He had spent many days thinking about it, but he knew that he would not find answers by staying in his room.

“I will go out into the world!” declared Randolph the Wise. “I will find and bring back here some answers from there.”

Randolph the Wise put on his coat and hat, picked up his bag, and gripped his staff. Then, turning his face towards the rising sun, he set out on his journey through Wales.

It was in this way that Randolph the Wise began his spiritual quest and search for meaning.

1 A Steep Climb



It was late winter and Randolph stood in the early morning sun, leaning on his staff. Randolph was thinking about his journey to this place. He had walked for miles along the broad grey road, travelling with cars, lorries and tractors. He had seen the tall pylons crossing the landscape, firmly gripping their power lines. He had passed the remains of an old nuclear power station beside a great lake. He had smelt the coal and the wood smoke coming from the chimneys of people's houses.

Now, Randolph was here, listening to the sound of running water and looking up at the wooden building in front of him. A long green sign attached to the building's roof said, "Centre for Alternative Technology." Randolph thought carefully about these words and what they might mean.

To enter the Centre for Alternative Technology, Randolph had to climb 58 steep steps. So, he followed the path curving upwards, higher and higher. As he climbed, Randolph noticed large slopes of slate rubble all around him. In some places, the slate was very obvious with tall metal fences separating it from the path. In other places, the slate was not so easy to see because it was partly hidden by trees and shrubs. Something else also caught Randolph's eye when a shiny surface gleamed in the sun. There, perched on a slate crag above him, dark rectangular panels had been tilted towards the sky.

Randolph turned to look back along the path. He was surprised to see that a valley had appeared below him. Peering down into the valley, Randolph scribbled in his notebook. Is this a big slate hill? What kind of place is built here?



2 Changing Places



At the top of the hill, Randolph discovered a large pond and a collection of buildings. The buildings were different from those that Randolph had seen before. These were made of wood, earth, straw and slate.

Searching for clues, Randolph entered a wooden hut. Inside, a film started and Randolph sat on a bench to watch. He learned that this Centre for Alternative Technology was created in 1973 on the site of an old slate quarry. Some people had begun to worry about the effects of life on the world around them. "Can things be done differently?" they asked, and this place explored that question.

Back outside, Randolph found two women beside a black-and-white photograph of a stark slate landscape. "You are here," the photograph said. Then, the women set out on the woodland walk leading further into the quarry. Randolph decided to follow them.

Along the path, the women stopped beside a sign. Exclaiming and pointing, one woman bent down to pick up some small flat slivers of rock scattered around it. When the women moved on, Randolph walked over to the sign to see what the excitement was about. He read these puzzling words, "Where you are standing was once at the bottom of the sea." Randolph looked around him. He could see and smell the woodland and he could hear the birds singing.

Reading on, Randolph discovered how things had once looked very different. Over many millions of years, layer-upon-layer of mud built up on the seabed. This mud became shale rock. With the Earth's natural pressure and heat, the shale became slate. This slate was then forced upwards to form some mountains in North Wales. Randolph closed his eyes and imagined what this might have looked like. He then examined the small pieces of slate at his feet.





Randolph walked on, passing bare-branched trees and glossy rhododendron bushes. At a small shaggy thatched building called the 'Hairy Hut', the path led sharply downwards, taking Randolph and the women to the quarry.

There, peering over the cliff edge, Randolph wondered at the huge chasm below and why it was there. The women read a nearby sign, describing how men and boys blasted great slabs of slate off the rock face. Good usable slate could create thirty times its weight in waste. One woman said, "That explains the slate tip hills all around us. All this happened in such a short time – around 120 years. The quarry closed in the 1950s. Now just see how nature is reclaiming the land." They looked at the tiny plants, shrubs and trees taking hold in the slate rubble.

As the women turned to leave, Randolph approached them. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

One woman said, "Here, you can see how people are always using places and changing them. So much has happened on this old quarry land. This is an important place for me. I want to understand more about how people can live without harming the world and draining its resources. I'm concerned about the future."

The other woman nodded, saying, "Change happens and it is really difficult to understand. I am interested in the way places change. This whole planet is alive and nothing stays the same."

Then, the women gave Randolph a piece of slate rubble. "This is what really matters to us here. Please take this gift back with you," they said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



3 Footprints and Choices



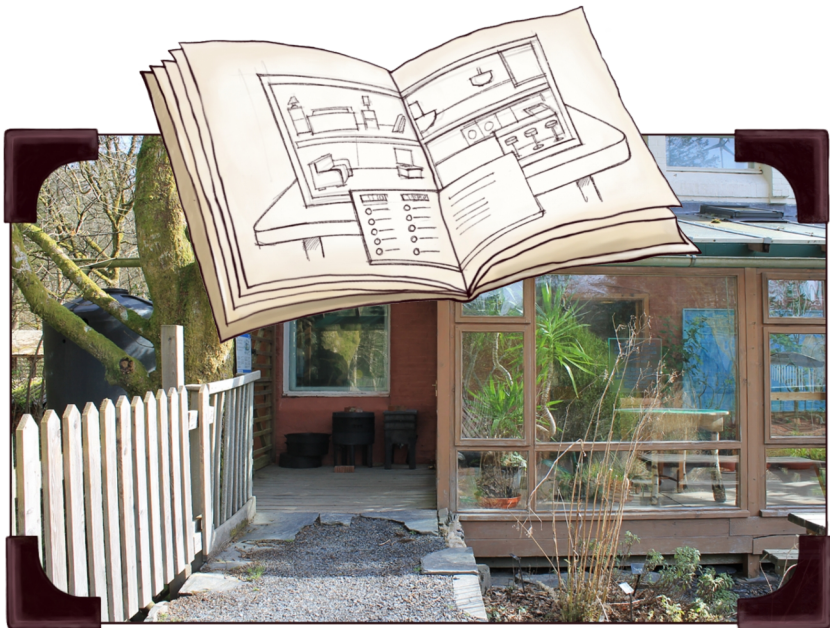
Randolph returned to the collection of buildings that he had seen earlier. He remembered a small dome structure made of triangular windows, and he wanted to examine it properly.

Stepping through the dome's doorway, Randolph immediately felt the bright warm space within. Some plants in pots had been placed around the sides of the dome on the floor. There were coloured maps and circles on some of the windowpanes. Randolph moved closer to see what they had to say.

"How we compare to other countries," read Randolph. Underneath, there were orange circles of different sizes, showing different countries. Some countries had much bigger circles than others. The size of the circle related to the average amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) produced in a year by each person. Producing so much carbon dioxide was not good for life on earth. Randolph studied the circles and the numbers carefully. What made some circles so much bigger than others?

When Randolph left the dome, he followed a man with his young son into a big wooden building called 'The Whole Home'. Inside, they found a miniature house on display. On a control panel fixed in front of it, there was a list of household electrical equipment with a button beside each item. As the boy and his father pressed the buttons for 'television', kettle', 'cooker', 'lights', and 'tumble dryer', they saw how much electricity was being used. Some things used more than others. Then, they found some light bulbs and learnt that some bulbs also used more electricity than others.

Finally, they visited a bathroom, with a bath, sink and toilet. There, they found a sign that said, "The bathroom takes 60% of your water." There was also some helpful advice on how to use less water, which included not leaving water running when brushing your teeth.





Randolph followed the man and his son as they left 'The Whole Home' and started to explore its garden. There, they found a greenhouse for growing plants when it was too cold outside. Beside the greenhouse, a water butt collected rainwater from the roof. Crossing the small path, they found rows of winter vegetables, looking strong and healthy. Then, they found a wooden container for home composting.

Reading the instructions for making compost, the young boy said, "Can we make compost from our kitchen and garden rubbish, Dad? It's good for plants and other things too." Before his father could answer, his son had rushed over to a small wildlife pond, looking for signs of life among the reeds.

When they were ready to move on, Randolph approached the man and his son. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

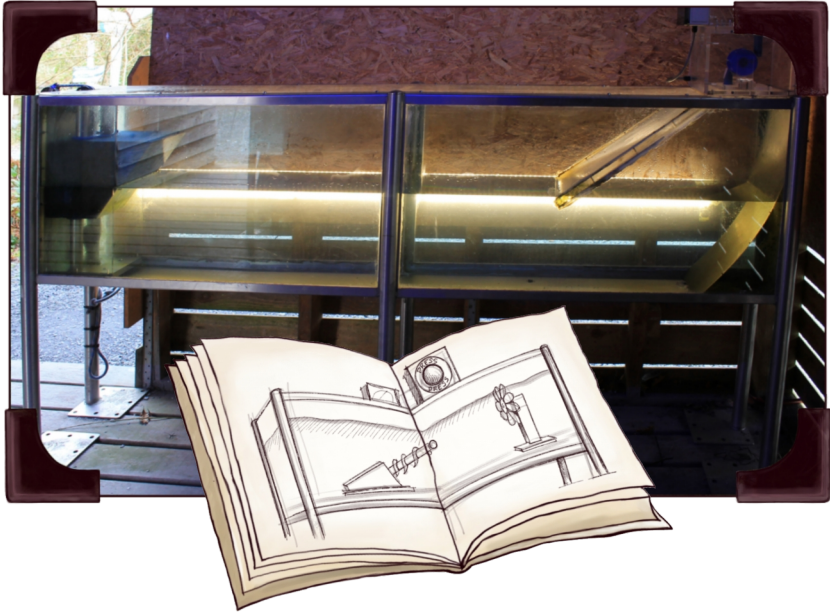
The man said, "This place makes me think about how people live and about the future. The number of people in the world is growing and our human footprints are large. Are we really harming the world, which gives us life? Here, I see the size of the problem."

The young boy said, "I have made a picture of my two feet. One foot is red and the other foot is blue. The red foot shows the things that I do that can harm the world. The blue foot shows the things that I can do to change that. There are many things that I can't change on my own, but I do have some choices."

The young boy then gave Randolph the drawing of his footprints. "This is what really matters to me here. Please take this gift back with you," he said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



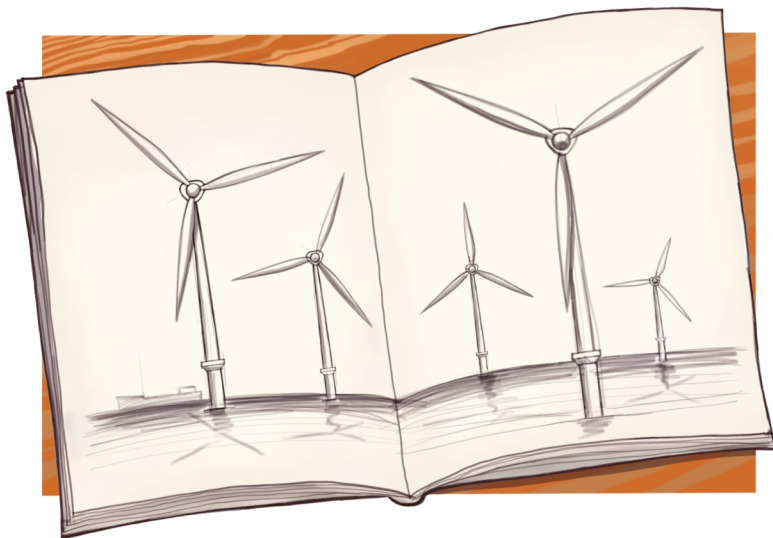
4 Power



Randolph continued walking along the paths, passing through each building in turn. Seeing so many different technologies on display, Randolph wondered at the creativity and skill of human beings.

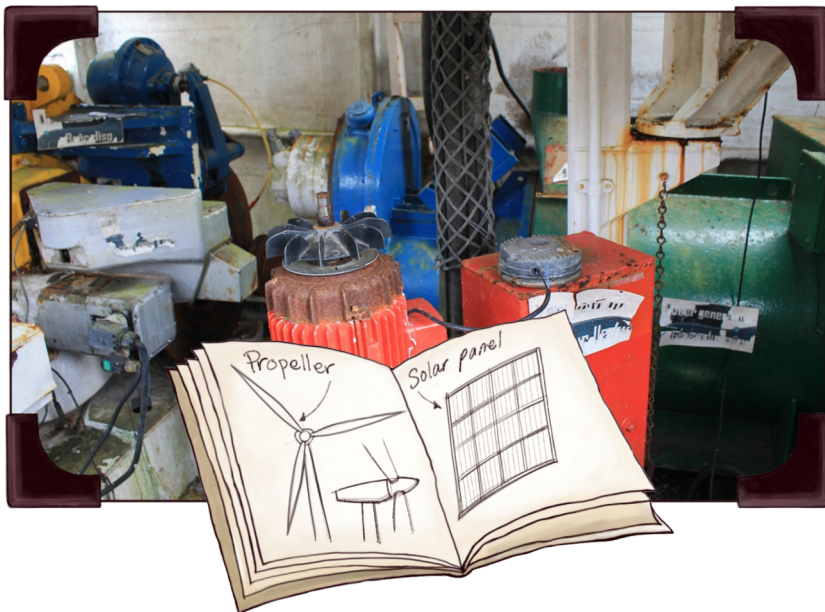
One wooden hut was quite dark inside with a distinctive blue hue. Here, Randolph saw long tanks of water, showing how electricity could be produced from the waves and the tides. Beside one water tank, a young girl was pulling on a rope to make waves like the sea. The waves pushed air through a turbine, making it spin round and round. As the turbine spun, it powered a generator, making electricity.

Nearby, the girl's older brother was pressing a big red button on another water tank. After reading a sign about how the tides could make electricity, he called to his sister to have a look.



The boy said to his sister, “We live on an island surrounded by water. Here, it says that the waves and the tides are reliable sources of energy. We know that there are always two tides every day and these may be used in tidal barrages and lagoons to make electricity. There are also strong underwater currents and these may be used to make electricity, too – it’s a bit like building wind farms underwater.”

The young girl thought for a moment, and then said, “We passed a very big wind farm on the way here today. That wind farm was out at sea, on top of the water. Like the tides, the water currents are always there. It is different with the wind. But maybe it is windier out at sea than on the land. Can we look at wind power now?”



Randolph followed them outside. Soon, the young girl and her brother had found one large blade on display, taken from a wind turbine. After examining it closely, they climbed up a wooden walkway, and peered into the mechanical interior of the old wind turbine. Looking at the colourful parts inside, the boy said, "I would like to see this working to understand how it makes electricity." His sister agreed.

Next, they started to count the number of solar panels on the buildings around them. There were different types and sizes of solar panel, but they all used sunlight to make electricity.

When the young girl and her brother had finished exploring different ways of making electricity, Randolph approached them. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

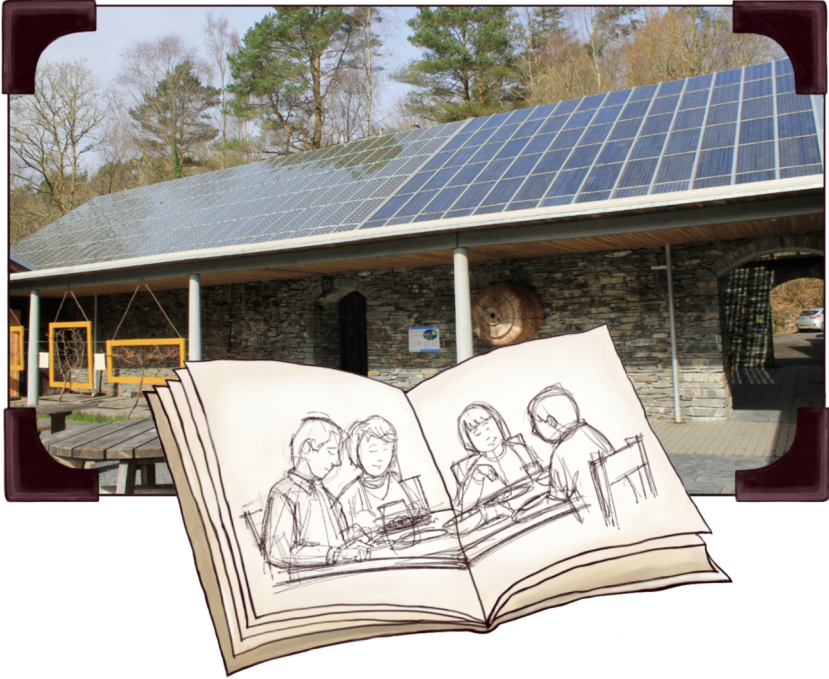
The girl said, “I didn’t know that there were so many ways of making electricity. I need to think carefully about this and what is best for us now and in the future.”

The boy added, “It’s not just making electricity that is a challenge but also how we store it. Storing electricity effectively and safely is very important so that it is there to use when we need it.”

Then, the boy gave Randolph a battery from his pocket. “This is what really matters to me here. Please take this gift back with you,” he said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



5 Another View

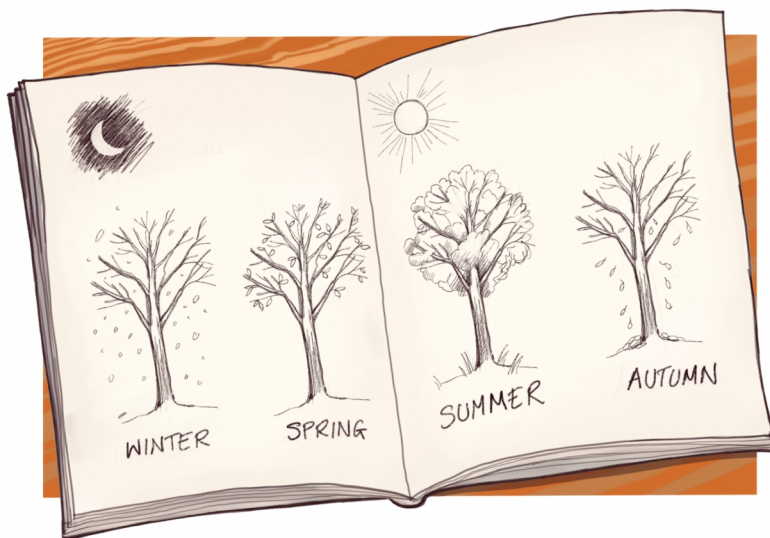


Randolph spotted a smart stone building with wooden 'picnic' benches on a terrace in front of it. Inside the building, he found a restaurant, serving vegan food. There, some visitors were sitting at one of the tables. As they ate their lunch of chilli and rice, they talked, and Randolph sat down nearby to listen.

A young man was speaking about different sources of energy. These sources included nuclear, oil, coal, gas, wind, solar, water, and biofuels. After some argument about the best sources of energy, he said, "Whichever energy sources we use, I think that it is just as important to use less of it. We need to learn how to use energy better. This could mean being less wasteful of electricity, as well as making what we use more efficient."

The person sitting next to him had another thought, and said, "I studied history at college and this has helped me to understand how our lives have changed over the past hundred years or so. Here, in this Centre for Alternative Technology, there was one sign that said human beings may have forgotten some important lessons from the past. There was a time when people's lives were more closely connected to nature – the seasons, light and darkness, weather, local materials. Perhaps now, we really have lost touch with all this. I like the idea of trying to use more local energy sources and then using other sources only to 'top up'. This would be one way of dealing with some of our energy worries."

The group fell silent as they thought about this idea and what the local energy sources would look like.





The silence was broken when a young woman, said, "There is a big job to be done with changing *how* people think, too. People seem to expect to have power or water or many other things, whenever they want them. This is so basic today, if you can afford it. Do we really need to use so much of everything, and how would our lives change if we used less?"

She continued, saying, "People are very different. I wonder what arguments could be used to get them to do things differently. What argument would you use with someone who is mostly interested in money? Or, what about someone who is worried about the future of the world for their children? Or, what about someone who feels that they are too small to make any difference?"

When the group stood up to leave, Randolph approached them. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

One person answered Randolph, saying, "This place makes me think about how things can be looked at in different ways. There is me, and the things that I do to care for the future. Then, there are businesses, schools, towns or cities. Then, there are whole countries and the wider world. All these are important."

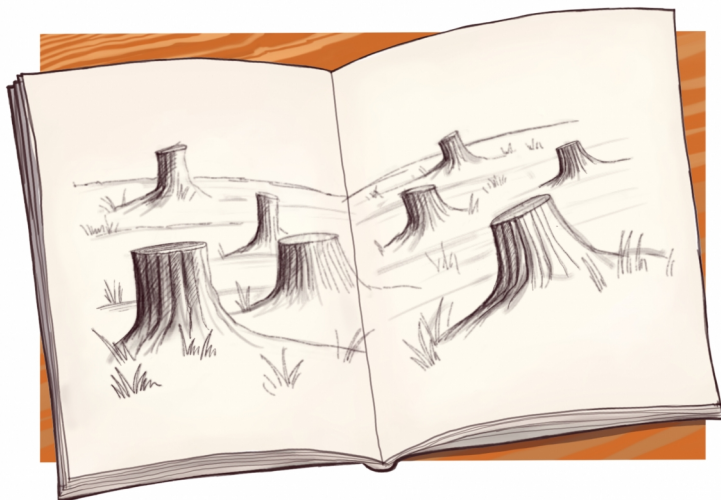
Another person nodded, and said, "It helps to know that there are bigger pictures. There are no simple answers."

Then, the group gave Randolph a drawing of the world. "This is what really matters to us here. Please take this gift back with you," they said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell.

Randolph then frowned and pondered. He could see that caring for the future really mattered. He knew that this was part of his spiritual quest and search for meaning. "But what do other people in different places say about this?" asked Randolph.



6 The Wheel of Life



Randolph trekked north and then south, east and then west. His search led him by mountains and valleys, through cities and towns, around coasts and lakes. Then, at the edge of a wood, he finally stopped.

Beside the tall trees, Randolph had noticed a large area of short tree stumps. Someone had been cutting down the trees. Walking in the bare stubbly landscape, Randolph soon realised that he was not alone. He could hear the murmur of voices and the sound of spades slicing through soil. Looking around him, Randolph saw some people working hard, planting young trees. He watched them dig one hole after another, place a small tree in each hole, and then gently pack soil around it.

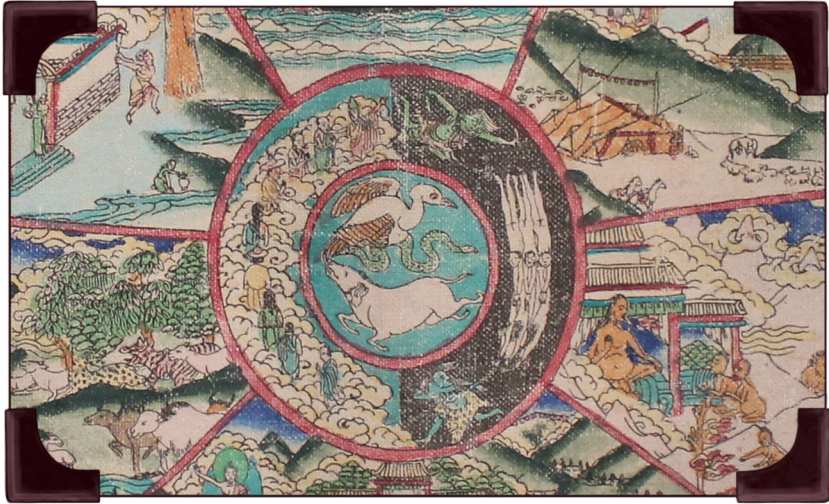
One of the women was wearing a copper bracelet with the words 'Om Mani Padme Hum' in Tibetan engraved on it. As Randolph read these mysterious words, he muttered, "I wonder what a Buddhist can tell me about caring for the future?"

When the tree planters took a break, one man opened his backpack and carefully pulled out a rolled-up cloth. "My father gave this to me," he said. "It has been hand-painted by a Buddhist monk in Northern India."

Everyone, including Randolph, looked as the man slowly unrolled the cloth to reveal a picture. They moved closer to study the painting's fine detail. The woman with the bracelet said, "It's the Tibetan Wheel of Life." The man nodded, saying, "I'm going to hang it on my wall to remember what it teaches about life. Planting trees makes me think about how we treat the natural world. When we harm it, we are harming ourselves. When we care for it, we are caring for ourselves. We are also caring for the future. The Wheel of Life helps explain this."

Randolph wondered at the Wheel of Life and what it had to teach, so Randolph asked the question, "What might a Buddhist say about caring for the future?"





The man pointed to the Wheel of Life, and said, “The Wheel of Life explains why people harm, others, themselves and the natural world a lot of the time. Do you see the three animals at the centre of the wheel? The pig is a symbol for our ignorance. The cockerel is a symbol for our greed. The snake is a symbol for our hatred. The animals look like they are eating one another – they are all tied together. So, if we harm the natural world by cutting down trees and not replacing them, our actions are being powered by ignorance, greed and hatred. This causes great harm because trees are important for all life on earth, including our own.”

Then, the man pointed to the other circles surrounding the three animals, and said, “These circles show what happens when we let ignorance, greed and hatred control our lives.” Everyone gazed at the other circles in the wheel.

The man continued, saying, “When our lives are controlled by ignorance, greed and hatred, we find ourselves stuck on a turning wheel of pain and suffering. We can never be truly happy. We are being held in the jaws of this creature called death. But there is a way out.”

The man pointed to a Buddha who was sitting peacefully outside the Wheel of Life, and said, “We can be like the Buddha. The Buddha shows wisdom by understanding how the world works, as well as care and concern for all living things.”

The woman with the bracelet added, “Our problems need more than just science and technology to fix them. We have to look inside ourselves too, where some deeper answers are found.”

The woman then gave Randolph her bracelet. “Please, take this back with you,” she said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued on his journey.



7 A Green Mosque



Randolph trekked on and on, braving the sun and the rain, then the gales and the snow. He did not stop until he was standing beside a city mosque. Outside the mosque, some young people were busy picking up litter. They were wearing special gloves and using long litter-picking tools to grab hold of paper, wrappers, cans, and plastic scattered among the grass and shrubs around the mosque. The litter was placed securely in sacks.

One girl said, "I think that some of this rubbish has escaped from people's bins, but these cans have been thrown here. We will have to do this again next week." Standing back to look at their work, one boy said, "It looks much better now. Litter is a problem everywhere. People should be more careful with their waste."

As Randolph watched the young people clearing the litter and talking, he muttered, "I wonder what a Muslim can tell me about caring for the future?"

When the young people had finished picking up litter, they went into the mosque. Randolph followed them past the bike racks and through the mosque's big door. Inside, the young people took off their gloves and washed their hands. Immediately, Randolph noticed something unusual about the taps. The water flowed out automatically when hands were placed under a tap. Then, as soon as the hands were moved away, the water stopped flowing.

The young people went into the kitchen to find some fruit. There, in the kitchen, Randolph found signs on the walls to remind people to save energy by switching off lights and other electrical equipment. He spotted a compost bin for kitchen waste, as well as coloured recycling bins, all carefully labelled. Then, on a kitchen worktop, he recognised the Fairtrade symbol on a bunch of bananas and packets of tea and chocolate.

As the young people were enjoying their fruit, Randolph asked the question, "What might a Muslim say about caring for the future?"





One of the young people said, “Our mosque is trying to become a ‘green mosque’. This means that we are doing what we can to look after the Earth. You may have seen some of these things, just by looking around this mosque. Next weekend, we are all going on a city nature walk.”

Another person added, “We also have speakers who come here and talk to us about how being Muslim and looking after the Earth is part of our faith. I remember one speaker reminding us how God created everything. The Earth was made well, with everything in balance. God created human beings and made them stewards of the Earth. This means that we are responsible for looking after the Earth. Nothing here is ours. It all belongs to God, and it will return God.”

Randolph wondered at this big responsibility, and what ‘balance’ on the Earth looked like.

Finally, one boy said, “There are lots of things that we can do locally to be good stewards of the Earth, but it has to be more than that. People in all parts of the world need to work together. It is a huge task. Also, It is not just about people. It says in our holy book, the Qur’an, that, ‘All the creatures that crawl on the Earth and those which fly with wings are communities like yourselves’. It is easy to forget that.”

Then, the boy picked up his litter-clearing equipment, and he gave it to Randolph. “Please, take this back with you,” he said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued on his journey.



Can you help Randolph?

Randolph the Wise has been given many gifts on his travels. He has also made many notes in his notebook. But the quest is not yet over. There is still space in his bag for more things to help him reflect on 'caring for the future' as something that really matters.

Randolph needs your help.

What other places could Randolph visit to find out about caring for the future?

Who could he ask in those places?

Do you think that caring for the future is something that really matters?

How do you care for the future?

What gift would you give Randolph to take back with him?



Randolph the Wise Returns Home

As the sun set, a weary Randolph the Wise returned to his room, where he carefully unpacked his bag. One by one, he placed in front of him *all* that he had collected on his journey through Wales.

Then, Randolph the Wise sat in his chair, scratched his old grey head, and thought about the very big question.

“What *really* matters?” he asked again in a deep, booming voice. This time, *all* that he had collected on his journey answered him.

Randolph the Wise listened carefully and smiled.

“This is an essential part of my spiritual quest and search for meaning!” he said. “Caring for the future is important for many people. They show their care in different ways and for different reasons. Caring for the future is something that *really* matters.”

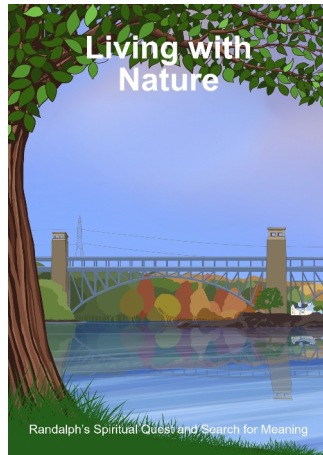
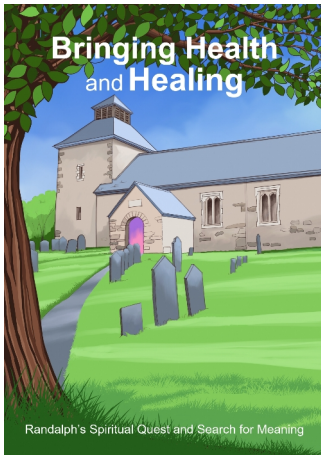


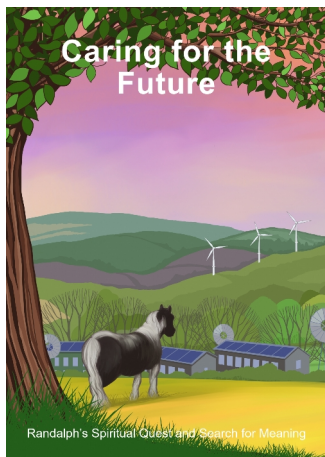
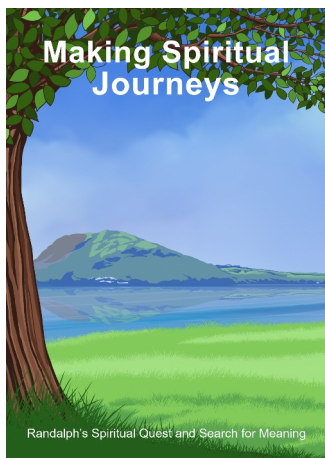


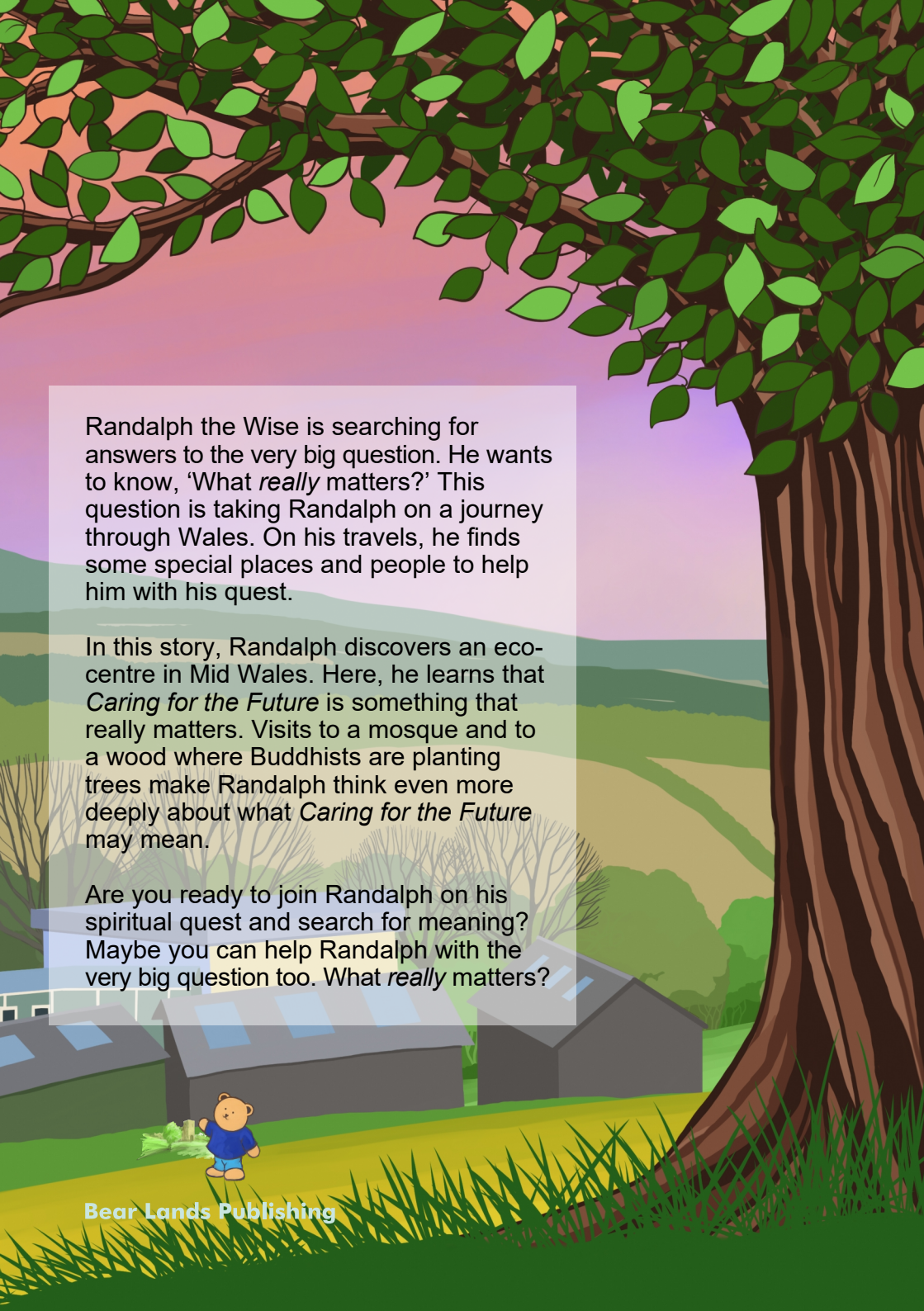
Read more...

Join Randolph the Wise on some of his other travels around Wales.

All storybooks are published in both Welsh and English. Open access copies are available on the Welsh Government 'Hwb' website (hwb.gov.wales) and on the St Mary's Centre website (st-marys-centre.org.uk). Teachers' guidance material, films and music are also provided.







Randolph the Wise is searching for answers to the very big question. He wants to know, 'What *really* matters?' This question is taking Randolph on a journey through Wales. On his travels, he finds some special places and people to help him with his quest.

In this story, Randolph discovers an eco-centre in Mid Wales. Here, he learns that *Caring for the Future* is something that really matters. Visits to a mosque and to a wood where Buddhists are planting trees make Randolph think even more deeply about what *Caring for the Future* may mean.

Are you ready to join Randolph on his spiritual quest and search for meaning? Maybe you can help Randolph with the very big question too. What *really* matters?