

Environmental Issues

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Programme Three Outline

Asking the Questions

2 minutes

A kaleidoscope of images and questions introduces issues and areas of concern related to the environment. Young people comment through a series of soundbites.

The Buddhist Teaching

5 minutes

The Principle of Conditionality

Ani Rinchen Khandro, a nun from Samye Ling Monastery, helps oversee the environmental work on Holy Island, off the coast of Scotland. With the resident gardener, she visits the permaculture garden which has been established at the north end of the island. The garden and other natural features of the island are used to illustrate the **Principle of Conditionality**.

The Law of Karma

3 minutes

This fundamental principle that **actions have consequences** is outlined. We see monks and nuns working on the shrine room of the nuns' retreat centre at the southern tip of the island and, back at the garden, hear about some of the recycling on the island.

Buddhists Respond

Filmed in situ, five practising Buddhists give their views on:

11 minutes

- **environmental causes and concerns**
- **possible ways forward**

Contributors

Theravada - Most Venerable Vajiragnana **Tibetan Tradition** - Ani Rinchen Khandro
Soto Zen - Reverend Saido **Japanese Pure Land** - Reverend Professor Sato
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order - Dharmachari Guhyapati

Background Information

The Holy Island Project

This beautiful and rugged island is situated off the coast of Arran in the Firth of Clyde, Scotland. It is one and a half miles long and has a long history of association with the sacred. It boasts an ancient healing spring, the hermit cave of a 6th century monk, St. Molaise, and evidence of a 13th century monastery. Since 1992 the island has been under the stewardship of the Samye Ling Buddhist community. It offers a peaceful haven for hundreds of day and weekend visitors and volunteers, as well as providing accommodation for both long and short retreats.

The work of the Holy Island Project focuses on three concerns: the environment, world peace and spirituality. The environmental work is seen as a blueprint for others to follow and the project is part of the worldwide Alliance for Religion and Conservation. The well planned conservation programme includes a permaculture garden, the planting of 27,000 native hardwood trees and careful management of the island's unique flora and fauna.

An Interfaith Centre for Peace is planned for the island as well as a monastery retreat centre for 108 people. For further information see Contacts, p62.

Ani Rinchen Khandro is a nun in the **Tibetan** tradition (Karma Kagyu Lineage). She is based at the Samye Ling Monastery in Eskdalemuir, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, and oversees the promotion work of the Holy Island Project.

Most Venerable Vajiragnana is head monk of the London Buddhist Vihara. He is one of the most senior monks in the **Theravada** school resident in Britain.

Reverend Professor K.T. Sato runs the Three Wheels Temple in West London, the first establishment of the Japanese True **Pure Land**, (Jodo Shin Shu) school in Britain.

Dharmachari Guhyapati is a member of the **Western Buddhist Order** in London. He devotes most of his time to campaigning on the environment and related issues.

Reverend Saido is a member of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. He is Vice-Abbot of Throssel Hole Abbey, a monastery in the **Soto Zen** tradition, in Northumberland.

Setting



Contributors

The Principle of Conditionality



Key Points

The Principle of Conditionality, The Law of Causation and Conditioned Co-production are all translations of the Pali term *paticca-samupada*.

Buddhists believe that as part of his Enlightenment experience, the Buddha understood the nature of existence. He put his realisation, which is essentially beyond words, into the conceptual form of **paticca-samupada**, or The Principle of Conditionality.

This principle teaches that

- everything comes into being and is maintained by a complex web of conditions
- everything is part of the network of conditions maintaining something else
- nothing exists completely independent of anything else
- everything ceases when the conditions that maintain it cease
- the whole of existence is a ceaseless process of flux and change
- conditionality applies on all levels of existence from the physical environment to the human mind

If this is, that comes to be;

from the arising of this, that arises;

if this is not, that does not come to be;

from the stopping of this, that is stopped.

- Majjhima-Nikaya 11; Collection of Middle Length Sayings

The Law of Karma

Key Points

**The Law of Karma states that actions have consequences.
 The word karma simply means action.**

The Law of Karma

- is an important Buddhist teaching; some appreciation of this law is essential to an understanding of Buddhism.
- springs from the Buddha's teaching of the Principle of Conditionality. The Buddha understood that everything which exists is subject to change, dependent on conditions.
- is the application of the Principle of Conditionality to the process of life and death.
- is like a scientific law; it merely explains how things happen. It does not indicate the existence of a law-giver. There is no one who rewards or punishes us.
- does not mean that everything that happens to us is the result of Karma. In a complex web of conditions, there can be many reasons why something happens.
- applies only to deliberate, or 'willed', actions.
- asserts that skilful actions, based on compassionate, generous and clear states of mind, will have positive consequences and
- unskilful actions, driven by negative states of greed, hatred and ignorance, will have negative consequences.

Greed, hatred and ignorance are known as the Three Root Poisons. They can be seen represented by the cock, snake and pig at the hub of the Wheel of Life.

All actions of body, speech and mind have an effect. Change will happen anyway, but because of the Law of Karma, it is possible to change for the better.

**Our life is shaped by our mind,
 we become what we think.**

**Suffering follows an evil thought
 like the wheels of a cart follow
 the oxen that draw it.**

**Our life is shaped by our mind;
 we become what we think.**

**Joy follows a pure thought
 like a shadow that never leaves.**

- *Dhammapada*



Interview Transcripts



Theravada

Most Venerable
Vajiragnana

Head Monk
London Buddhist Vihara

Causes and Concerns

My main concerns are about destroying forests or cutting down trees, polluting water and air, and sound pollution. All these things affect our lives. I personally feel that we must protect the environment because we are interdependent: we are dependent upon the environment and the environment depends on us. If we disturb the environment we will suffer the consequences.

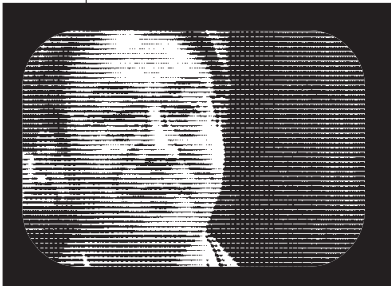
Ways Forward

We have to educate people to respect the environment, not destroy it, and be in harmony with the environment, be friendly with the environment; in other words to practise *metta* - loving kindness towards all living beings and living things. We practise the *metta bhavana*, a meditation on loving-kindness, radiating loving-kindness not only to human beings, but to all living things. We encourage people to practise the principle of non-violence.

To protect the environment we do small things like collecting paper, bottles and tins for recycling. That reduces environmental pollution. Monks were particularly advised by the Buddha not to spoil land, or to spoil water by urinating or spitting in it.

Consumerism encourages people to buy more and more, not to fulfil their needs but to fulfil their greed. People go on and on buying things, producers go on and on producing things, but natural resources are limited. One day all this will come to an end if people are not wise or thoughtful enough about the way that they consume things. All these things contribute to the pollution of the environment.

These transcripts from the video interviews have been edited, retaining the key points.



Pure Land

Reverend Professor
K.T. Sato

Head Priest
Three Wheels Temple

Causes and Concerns

What concerns me particularly, and what I can do something about, is the purification of our immediate environment: the Buddha shrine and the garden, and on another level, the relationship we enjoy with our friends and neighbours. This is because if our environment becomes soiled it will have immediately adverse effects on our minds and vice versa.

Ways Forward

Three Wheels is a Buddhist centre where people seek to develop themselves and become pure in mind; peaceful and sincere. The way forward for society on environmental issues is to do as we do when we seek to keep our Buddhist centre always clean and pure. Small as the task may seem, what we can do in daily life is keep our centre as clean as possible. I sweep the street in front of our centre every morning, with a prayer in my mind for global purification.

We have made a Japanese stone garden at Three Wheels. The garden symbolises the Pure Land, the Land of Enlightenment. Many of our friends, both British and Japanese, co-operated in this work. Our motto was 'Harmony within diversity'.

Buddhists Respond Environmental Issues



Tibetan Tradition

Ani Rinchen Khandro

Nun

The Holy Island Project

Causes and Concerns

I feel concerned about the environment. If people are concerned about their own happiness and their own well-being they should feel concerned about the environment. We sometimes think we're one thing and the environment is something out there, separate, but we're so interconnected. If you want to be healthy in your mind and body you have to be in a healthy environment.

Ways Forward

Environmentally speaking, I think that people have got to become more aware of what they need as opposed to what they want. If we can live more simply, we can sustain our society much more. That is one of the main reasons why we meditate: you find that actually everything you need is within you. When you live more simply you become a lot happier.

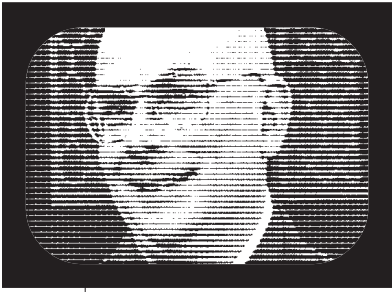
It's great that people protest when there's something really bad going on, but at the same time it's important to do something positive and to show an alternative way of being. That's what is so important about Holy Island.

Really, the Holy Island Project is all about sustaining a simple but productive and fruitful way of life into the future. So we are not just concerned with Holy Island here and now for our own selves but as pointing a way; it's like a blueprint for others to follow. Because if it can work here then it can work in any other place in the world. So we have a strong environmental programme here.

Our motto is 'The inner peace leads to world peace.' Individually we try to meditate and discover our own inner peace. The mind becomes more stable, more clear and you make contact with your own inner wisdom. If we can do that then it will automatically ripple out to the people around us and right out to the country, to the world.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.

Interview Transcript



Soto Zen

Reverend Saido
Order of
Buddhist Contemplatives
Throssel Hole Abbey

Ways Forward

If you want to change the world, you can change the part of the world which you can do something about, which is yourself. You can change the way that you are and the way that you act.

What drives us to consume ever more things is a sense of emptiness inside. The solution in the long run is for each individual to work away at dissolving their grasping: the mind that grasps, the mind that craves, the mind that must have. It's a bit like the mind of Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*: "We wants it! We must have it!" It's that kind of mind which creates the kind of havoc that we see around us and want to do so much about.

You can change **you**. So that means taking the trouble to recycle your bits of paper and separate out the tins and glass. It does actually make a difference if everybody does it. Small individual efforts build up into a very great effect. It's the only way that real change can happen.

With the practice of mindfulness, you become much more aware of what you are doing with simple objects, so that you don't treat them quite so carelessly. That extends their life, so you consume less. There are people here who will look at something and have a go at mending it, rather than just tossing it out. That's quite a challenge and it's really rewarding when it actually works. It's not done as an object in itself. We are not directly involved in environmental issues, but because people come here, they start to meditate; they are opened up to the compassionate view which is our natural state; they become more sensitive to what they're actually doing and they don't just toss stuff out quite as easily as before.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.

Buddhists Respond
Environmental Issues



FWBO

Dharmachari Guhyapati

Western Buddhist Order
Environmental Activist

Causes and Concerns

I think the most important environmental issue is for us to take more responsibility for our environment. Most of us feel that our immediate environment isn't something that we can look after; it's been taken out of our hands by governments and transnational corporations. The economics of globalisation is a growing problem. It's important that we find ways of localising decision-making processes so that people can be involved directly in taking care of the world that they live in; that we find ways to empower people to take that responsibility.

One of the central concerns of Buddhism is to overcome selfishness. One of the ways we can do this is to recognise that we are interconnected with the world around us. Our bodies are made up of the elements: the earth, the water, the air. So concern with the environment helps us to go beyond self-preoccupation and to open our hearts to become concerned for the world and those around us.

Ways Forward

I spend most of my time on environmental and social issues. I'm involved with the Green Party and a number of activist organisations including road protesters and Earth First, a direct action network. Some of that work involves helping activists to see how the spiritual dimension can inform their approach to activism; how perhaps they can bring a more non-violent attitude to sometimes quite confrontational situations.

I think local communities can begin to come together around issues that concern them. For example, you might be interested in recycling and if recycling facilities aren't provided by your local council maybe you'll petition them for that.

One of the most important things is to learn to live relatively simply, realising that our happiness is not dependent on accumulating and consuming more and more and that we can find enjoyment and appreciation in fairly simple things.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.