



BUDDHIST ACTION MONTH
June 2014

BAM 2014: Suggestions for Buddhist Centre/Sangha Actions

(yellow highlights = CLIMATE CHANGE RELATED)

More details for each are given in the end-notes: see following pages to access them

Game-changing Actions

- 1** Switch your Centre/Sangha to Green Electricity, eg Good Energy.
- 2** Go Vegan at the Centre - and at home. For a day or a week per month if not forever.
- 3** Take a 'no-fly' pledge: for a year, for three, forever...
- 4** Become a Fair Trade Centre/Retreat Centre.
- 5** Join Transition Towns and get active.

To REALLY make a difference, consider going 'Beyond BAM'. Here's three more major suggestions:

- 6** Follow the Quakers' lead - commit to becoming a "low-carbon, sustainable community".
- 7** Measure the carbon footprint of you and your Buddhist Centre.
- 8** Set up a Carbon Reduction Pledge Scheme.

Awareness-Raising and/or Symbolic Actions

- 9** Show some climate change movies
- 10** Produce a Centre newsletter devoted to issues around climate change / peak oil
- 11** Create a Centre notice-board devoted to green initiatives
- 12** Set up cooking demonstrations of healthy vegan dishes using local produce or leftovers
- 13** Organise an Earth Hour
- 14** Research and host exercises from Joanna Macy's 'Work that Reconnects'
- 15** Promote cycling/ public transport/car sharing to the centre
- 16** Run a local Litter-Picking Day
- 17** Organise an Amnesty letter-writing circle.
- 18** Promote and perform the Flying and Driving Carbon Sadhanas
- 19** Send a delegation of your Young Sangha to an EcoDharma event in Spain.

- 20** Other resources

Notes on suggested actions

Game-changing Actions

1 Switch to Green Electricity. Switching to green electricity is probably the most powerful single action you can easily take: it is quick, cheap, and has a remarkably positive effect on your carbon footprint. So it's our no.1 suggestion for action - and one approach is to set a target of persuading 20/50/100 people in your local sangha to switch during BAM in June 2014. Collect pledges and make it a sangha-building exercise! The best British green electricity suppliers are [Ecotricity](#) and [Good Energy](#); the ECA has become an Affiliate of Good Energy ([goodenergy.co.uk](#)) and we invite everyone to quote our affiliate code **GE2190** when switching - we'll get £25 and so will the new customer!

It is easy to register your own Centre as an affiliate at www.goodenergy.co.uk/your-business/become-a-partner/sign-up-as-a-good-energy-partner.

2 Go Vegan at the Centre - and at home. Another 'switching' action: a single decision with an enduring consequence. Go vegan for a day or a week/month if not forever. For a powerful exposition of why veganism is an ethical issue (and vegetarianism is not really enough), see 'Buddhism on a Plate', by Samacitta, at thebuddhistcentre.com/vegans/buddhism-plate.

3 Take a 'no-fly' pledge: except in an emergency, you won't fly for a year, for three, forever... Signing forms committing to Platinum/Gold/Silver standards of not flying are available at http://www.networkforclimateaction.org.uk/toolkit/outreach_ideas/talking_to_people_on_the_street/flight_pledge.pdf. The simple fact is that the carbon impact of a single flight for a single person wipes out any other environmental efforts they might make over the whole year.

4 Become a Fair Trade Centre/Retreat Centre

In December 2013 Taraloka became a 'Fairtrade Temple' (official term - they don't know what to call a retreat centre), and according to Saddhanandi "they're all absolutely chuffed"!

See www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_places_of_worship/fairtrade_and_other_faiths.aspx

Here's some details on how to become a Fairtrade Place of Worship:

To become a Fairtrade Place of Worship, your mosque, temple, gurdwara or other place of worship needs to meet three goals which are about pledging to use and promote Fairtrade products. The three goals are -

- Serve Fairtrade tea and coffee for all meetings and events (for which you have responsibility)
- Move forward on using other Fairtrade products such as sugar, biscuits and fruit
- Promote Fairtrade during Fairtrade Fortnight and during the year through events, worship and other activities whenever possible

To register as a Buddhist Temple just complete their 'Places of Worship' form

(fairtrade.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2010/u/updated_other_places_of_worship_application_form.doc)

and send it via post to 'Fairtrade Places of Worship', 3rd Floor, IBEX House, 42-47 Minories, London EC3N 1DY. Once they receive your application and it is approved, they will then send you an official Fairtrade certificate and other materials to help you get started with your campaign!

Notes: the standard seems to be set somewhat higher for Christian churches wishing to become Fair Trade - maybe we should aim for that higher standard? See details at fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_places_of_worship/fairtrade_diocese.aspx.

5 Join Transition Towns (and get active!) The Transition movement aims to create local community networks to address climate change: their key words are ‘resilience’ and ‘reskilling’. For them, local communities are intermediate in size between individuals (too small to be effective) and government (too remote to influence). Their main website is at www.transitionnetwork.org, they have a great list of ‘ingredients’ for successful transition at www.transitionnetwork.org/ingredients.

6 Follow the Quakers’ lead: commit to becoming a “low-carbon, sustainable community”.

This is our primary suggestion to the Chairs (indeed, to all Buddhist Sanghas) if they wish to really take seriously the need to link our ethical commitments with environmental realities. It’s also the way to make the most of the opportunities for action opened up by BAM. We’re calling it **“Beyond BAM”** - to start with, it’s not so much a specific measurable action as a declaration of intent. However we hope it’ll be a declaration out of which many actions will flow in the future. Here’s some background on what the Quakers have done. At their British Yearly Meeting in Canterbury in August 2011, the 1500 people present made a collective decision the Quakers would become a low-carbon, sustainable community. They said: *“Our actions have as yet been insufficient... We need to arrive at a place in which we all take personal responsibility to make whatever changes we are called to. At the same time, we need to pledge ourselves to corporate action. The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. This will require a process to establish a baseline of current witness and a framework in which individual Friends and local meetings can share their successes.*

We believe this corporate action will enable us to speak truth to power more confidently. Growing in the spirit is a consequence of taking action, and action flows from our spiritual growth; here is the connectedness we seek. Only a demanding common task builds community.”

Their commitment calls on all Quakers to *“act personally, as meetings and corporately; to be accountable to one another; and to celebrate the changes that we are able to make”*, also noting that they *“need to allocate adequate resources to this process”* and that *“This process needs to be joyful and spirit-led, with room for corporate discernment at local, area and national level”*.

Since the 2011 resolution they have been working systematically to incorporate this new commitment into their everyday behaviour, both individually and collectively, producing some great resources to help this process: see their Sustainability Toolkit at www.quaker.org.uk/files/Sustainability-Toolkit-Nov-11_0.pdf

Triratna - like other Buddhist Sanghas - have done nothing like this, indeed our recognition that our personal ethical practice must take into account global environmental crises is pretty patchy. So we have quite a lot of catching up to do: but 2014 could be the year we change! Mokshini, Chair of the Brighton Buddhist Centre, comments *“It does seem that the Quakers are often at the cutting edge of translating ethical awareness into action and we could learn from them if that is the case.”*

Sahajatarā, also from Brighton, interviewed Jason from their Quaker Meeting House and here are some notes from their conversation: He said:

“Here’s some insights from our Quaker experience. There’s some vagueness about what it actually means to become a sustainable community, but for me it is about heading in the right direction rather than achieving total self-sufficiency overnight.

Following the decision, we took the first step in the permaculture process, ie to observe. As part of this we worked to establish a snapshot of where we were at:

www.quaker.org.uk/baseline.

We then shared our stories and worked on identifying areas to improve: www.quaker.org/sustainability-toolkit. It is worth noting that this didn’t happen overnight, it is ongoing - but as resources become available and better choices become accessible, we can progress by making that part of all subsequent decisions we make.

Sometimes it’s been about looking at things we could put into figures, at other times about listening to the Light and following our hearts, even if that meant admitting that at present we didn’t have a clear answer. Often solutions came about ‘as the way opened’.

I know you have shared spaces such as Buddhist Centres and retreat centres, and greening these may be a valuable way of working together, raising awareness and working out the aims of what becoming a sustainable community means to you. Shared spaces represent the witness of a whole community and I think they are a better place to start than individual action as it leads to shared insights and decisions rather than individualistic ones.

I would recommend setting up special interest groups within each of your Centres to talk about sustainability. Sustainability is more than just going green in a flash, the word also has wrapped up in its meaning the notion of time. Sustainability, if it happens, will grow out of communities, not just be imposed on them. It is this that leads to a lasting witness with strong roots”.

In Brighton they have already decided they want to move towards sustainability, and they have formed a steering group of 7 people to oversee the first year or two of the project. Sahajatarā says *“What you will probably find is that there are plenty of people in the Sangha already who have experience, ideas, willingness and know-how. Generally I have found more green awareness in the Mitra Sangha here than the Order Sangha”.*

- 7 Measure the carbon footprint of you and your Buddhist Centre.** The Quakers began their journey towards sustainability with *“a process to establish a baseline of current witness and a framework in which individual Friends and local meetings can share their successes”*; we suggest we do the same. They have created two very easy-to-use footprint calculators, one for individuals and one for Centres, you’ll find both at www.quaker.org.uk/climate-impact-calculators. Working through the calculations is both a powerful awareness-raising exercise and a sangha-building one. For lots of carbon-footprint information tidbits, try the book ‘How Bad are Bananas?’ - it’s fascinating.
- 8 Set up a Carbon Reduction Pledge Scheme.** Having calculate your present, ie baseline, carbon footprint, you can start looking for ways to reduce it. Hold a brain-storming meeting and as part of it, encourage people to pledge ‘x’ amount of ways to reduce their personal carbon footprint e.g. *“5 ways to reduce energy consumption”* - this could include walking to work one day/week, using public transport, turning appliances off standby etc...

Awareness-Raising and/or Symbolic Actions

- 9 Show some climate change movies:** eg the **Age of Stupid** (subtitled versions available online at vimeo.com/23597332 or youtube.com/watch?v=ZJ9DDkDKxDA or order a DVD from Amazon). Others include **Home**, by Yann Arthus-Bertraud (youtube.com/watch?v=jqxENMKaeCU); **An Inconvenient Truth** (youtube.com/watch?v=snJnoCzHz4M), and the recent documentary **Chasing Ice** (chasingice.co.uk). All are different, excellent, and disturbing. Movies are easy to put on, and great for awareness-raising and Sangha-building. Ideally, follow them with time for discussion maybe in small groups.
- 10 Produce a Centre newsletter devoted to issues around climate change / peak oil.**
- 11 Create a Centre notice-board devoted to BAM and other initiatives.** This can be a great focus for a sangha-building campaign and helps make visible the Centre's commitment and the actions being taken. Find someone committed to keeping it up-to-date though!
- 12 Cooking demonstrations of healthy vegan dishes.** There's a million ideas online at the vegan charity Viva! (recipes at www.vegetarianrecipeclub.org.uk). Triratna Mitra Jane Easton works for Viva! and would love to assist any Centres wanting to take up this suggestion. See also the www.lovefoodhatewaste.com website - it has lots of little videos, food preservation ideas, etc.
- 13 Organise an Earth Hour**, where all involved use zero energy for 1 hour either at the local Buddhist Centre or at home. Promote by creating an 'I Will If You Will campaign' - slogan "CARE + DARE + SHARE". See www.earthhour.org/page/get-involved/how-organisations-can-help



- 14 Research and host exercises from Joanna Macy's 'Work that Reconnects'.** See <http://workthatreconnects.org> for multiple resources, or her book '[Coming Back to Life](#)'. Akuppa, Parami, and others have experience of this work.
- 15 Promote cycling and/or public transport and/or car sharing to the Centre.** Freewheelers is a free online solution used by Buddhafield and others in Triratna, however it's fiddly to use and something in-house might be easier to manage.
- 16 Run a local litter-picking day. No explanation needed - just do it!**
- 17 Organise an Amnesty letter-writing circle.** Their current campaigns are at www.amnesty.org/en/individuals-at-risk, a letter-writing guide is at www.amnesty.org.uk/letter-writing-guide. Join an Amnesty group at www.amnesty.org.uk/groups or set one up at www.amnesty.org.uk/set-local-group. Cait, a

Birmingham mitra, set up a Buddhist letter-writing group: Amnesty agreed to send her specific details of Buddhist-related people and projects. This could possibly be reactivated.

18 Perform the Flying and Driving Carbon Sadhanas. These were composed by Lokabandhu and can be found at <http://thebuddhistcentre.com/glastonbury/two-carbon-sadhanas>. They can help people connect more imaginatively of the consequences of their driving or flying, and contain numerous many Buddhist references.

19 Send a delegation of your Young Sangha to an EcoDharma event - and when they return, give them a slot at your Regulars class to present what they learned. EcoDharma's unique focus is *"the development of an ecological consciousness honouring our mutual belonging within the web of life – drawing on the Buddhist Dharma and the emerging ecological paradigms of our time"*. Going there is a powerful experience, possibly life-changing. Their 2014 programme is at www.ecodharma.com/courses-events.

20 Other resources. There are a great many other groups and websites that offer a wealth of ideas, some of whom might have members of our respective Sanghas already active in them who could share their experience with others at the Centre. Here are a few suggested by Mokshini:

- The ethicalconsumer.org website has a wealth of ways to make a difference
- There is the Rough Guide to Ethical Living which has loads of info and many ideas
- The Transition Movement (www.transitionnetwork.org/support/what-transition-initiative or www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/the-transition-movement-today-totnes-tomorrow-the-world-2364355.html)
- One Planet Living – Brighton & Hove Council has gained accreditation for its efforts to develop the city as a One Planet City (www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/environment/sustainability-city/one-planet-city)
- Finding the links between faith and sustainability. Looking at the underlying values. See *Common Cause* for more ideas (<http://valuesandframes.org>)
- Painting a bright picture – the positive benefits of efforts towards greater sustainability – such as greater feelings of community.
- Carbon Conversations (<http://carbonconversations.org>) – small groups, as a way of providing a 'safe space' for people to open up to some of their concerns and difficulties in reducing their carbon footprint.
- Have a look at Operation Noah (www.operationnoah.org)