

Shanghai Buddhist Eight-Year Plan on Environment Protection (2010-2017)

Created by the Jade Buddha Temple, Shanghai, in collaboration with all other
Shanghai Buddhist monasteries, October 2009.

境由心造



We are living on a planet where the environment is deteriorating, and where many of the natural resources are increasingly being stretched. This is often seen as an external issue, but in the Buddhist teaching 境由心造 (translated as “our habitat is created by our hearts”) it is taught that our environment is *caused* by the “shared action” or “karma” of humankind.

Following from this teaching, Buddhism believes that the only way to begin changing our existing environment, is to change our inner mind. But how can people’s minds be open to change when they are already lost in the pursuit of high-consumption lifestyles? How can such people’s spiritual realm and sense of social responsibility be enhanced? We believe that this is the shared responsibility of the world's Religions and that the Shanghai Buddhist community should also make our own commitment.

PART ONE: Shanghai Buddhists' Environmental Efforts in Recent Years

In the light of increasing interest in environmental issues across all of society, Shanghai Buddhists have made the following positive actions in terms of advocating environmental protection, participating in environmental protection activities, and promoting environmental awareness:

1. **ADVOCACY:** Shanghai Buddhists took the lead in the advocacy campaign "Offering Incense in a Civilised Way". This involved recommending people to reduce their incense burning to just a few sticks, rather than the uncontrolled burning which has recently become a feature of visits to the temple. This has reduced pollution as well as reducing the dangers to the wooden structure of the monastery caused by so much burning.

2. **GREEN PLANNING:** Shanghai Buddhists have started to pay great attention to the monasteries' environmental improvement and landscaping. Regardless of its size, a monastery should have plenty of green trees and potted plants. The whole monastery should also be clean and hygienically maintained.

3. **ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:** Shanghai Buddhists have begun to promote environment awareness. Our aim is to integrate Buddhist thinking on spiritual environment protection into the minds and actions of Buddhist followers, in order to raise their environmental awareness.

4. **SEMINARS:** According to the requirements of the contemporary society, and through unearthing and carrying forward Buddhist beliefs and values with regards to the ecology, We have organised series seminars such as "Buddhist ethics and harmonious society", and "Buddhism and the ecological civilisation" to open people's minds and to have brainstorm to promote Buddhists thinking on environment issues;

5. **HEALTHY AND CIVILISED:** So far, dozens of monasteries in Shanghai have been awarded the title of "Civilised religious site in Shanghai". For two consecutive years, the Shanghai Jade Buddha Monastery and other monasteries have also been regarded as Healthy Monasteries by both the local district government and the Shanghai municipal government. Many monasteries have been recognized as "Civilised and Healthy Collective Units".

6. **RELEASING WILDLIFE:** The monasteries hold regular Releasing Lives Ceremonies. This is not just about releasing animals and birds from captivity. But also, this helps awaken the Buddhist sense of compassion to educate believers to respect all sentient beings, and stop cruelty to the natural world.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TEAMS:** These have been set up to organise activities around social welfare and environmental protection. This follows the Buddha's

precept “to carry forward the principles of Buddhism, to promote environmental protection, to take action on environment protection and charity, and to seize every chance to be of service”. The Jade Buddha monastery’s Environmental Protection Office was officially launched on May 8th, 2009. The aim is to create a centre for advocating spiritual environment protection and raise people’s environment awareness. Under the leadership of the monks, the Environment Protection Office also calls for volunteers from the wider community to hold the following environmental activities and campaigns:

1. On the second Sunday of each month to organise seminars on environmental issues, working on the "Mother River Care Project" for Shanghai’s Suzhou River.
2. Regularly holding other seminars on environment issues
3. Zen-meditation Summer Camp every July including teachings about Nature
4. Regularly planning activities advocating, for example, collecting used batteries for careful disposal, using environmental carry bags, releasing wildlife etc

PART TWO: The Shanghai Buddhist 8 Year Plan on Environment protection

Buddhism’s teachings about simple living and cherishing your blessings, are very similar to the concept of “green consumption” valued by the modern environmental movement. In our daily lives, for example, this involves actively promoting the idea of not using disposable fast-food containers (popular throughout China), reducing use of chemical detergents, sorting and recycling waste, promoting pollution-free diets and food sourcing; mobilising followers and monks into activities such as recycling, beach clean-ups, mountain clean-ups, tree planting and water conservation; calling people to start with small personal actions such as saving water as they wash, saving electricity, and not wasting food. All of these would also bring benefit to public welfare.

We have a duty to let the concept of Eco-friendliness penetrate deeply into people’s minds, and to become part of their conscious behavior. On the basis of the accumulated experience over years of effort into environmental protection, the Shanghai Buddhist community plans to focus on the following aspects in the next eight years.

1. PROMOTING ECOLOGICAL THINKING HIDDEN WITHIN OUR TEACHINGS.

Some of the most important elements supporting the building of a more ecologically conscious and harmonious society are the moral and ethical norms of the community. Buddhism can play a very active role in providing this support. Buddhist teachings - covering among other things the ethical codes of service within the community, compassionate lifestyles, the principles of following Nature, advocating simplicity and restraining extravagance, the spiritual realm of peace and purity, and the ecological wisdom of harmony between man and nature - will provide favorable spiritual resources to deal with the current ecological crisis. If the monks, nuns and other staff within the

monastery could understand these Buddhist teachings correctly, and bear them in mind, then activities of environment protection could be spiritually ensured.

With environmental protection handbooks, talks and activities, we Buddhists will promote eco-friendly ideas to a wide range of followers, and thus spread such ideas to all walks of life in the local communities. This will help people to be more aware of these issues, and to form an effective force to protect nature together.

Many monasteries in Shanghai run vegetarian restaurants. In addition to a vegetarian diet to meet people's need, such restaurants could also create a "Buddhist retreat center", where special rooms are set up for retreat, and where there are facilities to give lectures or talks on how to cook vegetarian food. Food from wild animals should never be served.

Meanwhile, we will carry forward the concept of Spiritual Environment Protection to help create an *ethos* for contemporary China, which will bring changes for generations to come. Recently, the Shanghai Jade Buddha monastery has undertaken to cooperate with the Spiritual Civilization Construction Commission (part of the Shanghai Municipal Government) to form a leading panel on Spiritual Environmentally-friendly Projects.

2. EDUCATION

Our aim is to strengthen educational curricula and training programmes so that environmental protection can become part of the conscious behavior of each monk, nun and member of the temple staff. By using the "Wakening up the Public Life Forum" (set up by the Jade Buddha Monastery) as a platform Shanghai Buddhists will preach about the close links between a better life and environmental protection.

The educational element of the Eight Year Plan includes:

- *holding regular environmental lectures and seminars
- *running Zen "Mind Meditation Camps" including teaching about mindfulness to Nature
- *developing educational materials including a relevant website, and a booklet about Buddhism and environmental protection and tips which can be distributed to pilgrims and visitors.
- *creating educational posters and signs to put up in the monasteries;
- *seriously exploring ways and means to combine Buddhist ecological teachings with real life in the modern world, so that people can effectively to carry out a series of practical actions to protect the environment.

3. A SPECIFIC FUND TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

The plan is that Buddhists should set up specific funds for Environment Offices - which would probably involve a regular team from the monastery to be set up to ensure monastery's environment protection work to become regular, systematic, standardised and in good scale. This would be carried out in conjunction with the existing programmes recognized by the Shanghai administration, including the "Civilised Religious Site in Shanghai Programme, the Environmentally Healthy Site for Visitors Programme and the Hygienic site for visitors Programme.

4. THE NON-POLLUTING INCENSE PROGRAMME

Buddhist monasteries will continue to promote and advocate the "Offering of Incense in a Civilised Way" programme. The plan is to gradually to change the way that offerings have been made for thousands of years. The plan is, for example, to promote offering locally grown flowers instead of burning incense sticks to pay respect to Buddha. This would not only reduce air pollution but also prettify the monastery's environment. The Incense programme will be augmented by putting up posters and signs in monasteries, in places where people will notice them, or distribute the brochures to pilgrims and visitors to educate these them the meanings and practical impact of the "Mindful Offering of Incense". Other suggested measures include providing three free incense sticks, and/or a discount purchase of flowers or electronic candles for each visitor.

5. GREENING THE MONASTERIES

The aim is to make all Buddhist monasteries in China more environmentally friendly in the long term, and in the short term to create in Shanghai a model of urban Buddhist ecological monasteries to inspire others around the country. The idea is to use this experience to develop a guide or manuals for other urban monasteries. The first stage involves:

a) **Increasing the "green" elements in the monastery** to beautify the environment. Unlike the more famous "mountain area" monasteries, almost all the monasteries in Shanghai are built on flat land. Furthermore, land resources in Shanghai are extremely tight, and in most monasteries there is no spare ground that can be specifically devoted to tree vegetation. For this reason, Shanghai monasteries must develop local, achievable Green Strategies. For instance, such Green Strategies might involve increasing the numbers of flowers and potted plants inside the monastery grounds, to beautify the temple environment but also to freshen the air.

In the longer term, the Shanghai Jade Buddha Monastery could be used as a base to set up a "Buddhism and environmental education centre" specifically to provide training programmes for other urban Buddhist monasteries in China.

b) **Adopting Green design** in new monastic buildings. This will:

- * save energy:
- * maximise the use of natural light to reduce energy consumption,
- * use light-coloured roofs or green, grass-planted roofs, to cool down temperatures naturally in summer,
- * As far as possible, consider solar power as the supply for heating the monastery's rooms and water in winter

c) Encouraging monks, nuns and monastery staff to save energy including water, electricity and gas etc:

- *Turning off the tap while brushing your teeth or rubbing soap during shower;
- *Fixing dripping taps, and repair broken or leaking pipes in time;
- *Only taking the amount of water you need
- *Developing habits of turning off lights and electrical devices including chargers when no one is using them;
- *Reasonable use of air-conditioning: the temperature should be controlled carefully, neither too high nor too low, with the emphasis on not wasting energy because of a greedy desire for warmth or cool;
- *Using energy-efficient lighting and wisely placing light bulbs etc to make them most effective
- *Trying to install solar panels where conditions permit, to provide clean energy;
- *When buying a computer for the monastery, to give priority to laptops to reduce energy consumption.

d) Reducing pollution;

- *sorting monastery waste for recycling
- *Reducing plastic bags and Styrofoam cups and plates in the Monastery's kitchen and other areas. For example, in the Jade Buddha monastery, there are many activities - weekly lectures on Buddhism, open days for pilgrims twice a month; annual Forum week of "wakening up the public life", an annual charity week by "wakening up group", many Buddhist festivals, arts exhibitions etc - and the monastery needs to provide hundreds of thousands of dining services. This uses huge amounts of disposable tableware and causes serious environmental problems. Therefore the monastery pledges to improve this, with a target of reducing disposable tableware by 10% every year.
- *making the best use of monastery's vehicles, including carpooling. This would both save energy and reduce harmful gas emissions.

e). Recycling and improving household goods:

- *Used Batteries should be recycled and not be thrown away casually as they contain toxic substances
- *Recycled paper should be used in the office. Both sides of the paper should be used to print documents... and finally office paper should be sent for recycling
- *Less bottled water should be consumed. Empty plastic bottle should be recycled.

6. PROTECTING THE RIVER

The Buddhist monasteries in Shanghai will remain actively involved (and extend their involvement) in the "Mother River Care Project" to protect the Suzhou, the mother river of Shanghai. This involves regularly organising people to clean up the bank of Suzhou River to maintain its cleanliness.

7. PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND RELEASING WILD ANIMALS

Promote Buddhist teaching of prohibiting killing and nursing lives, and carry forward the tradition of releasing and protecting lives to make positive contribution to the balanced ecology;

8. WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT and LOCAL COMMUNITIES

We will communicate actively with the relevant departments of the community to incorporate the monastery's environment actions into related government plans or government-organised activities. This could ensure the funds are resources, and will also strengthen the ability to appeal to people. At the same time, we will communicate with NGO and related experts and scholars to enhance the flexibility and professionalism of our ecological outreach.

9. WORK WITH THE MEDIA

The monasteries will aim to attract attention from media in the wider society, so that the monastery's environmental protection actions can be gradually recognised and appreciated by the general public. This would attract more people to participate in the further development of ecological actions, and would expand the environmental team into the Buddhist community.

10. SET UP AWARDS

To set up an annual award in recognition of activities conducted by monasteries in environmental protection. In accordance with the requirement for the monastery's work, after a reasonable assessment of each monastery, the organizing committee will award a medal to the outstanding monastery to encourage its work. Following the award, an annual Spiritual Environmental Development Forum will be held to listen to the summary of the work done by monasteries this year while being a place to put forward constructive suggestions for the following year.

11. CELEBRATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

We will highlight one Buddhist festival day as an environment day for the monasteries;

- *to distribute booklets about environment issues;
- * to hold seminars, lectures to educate followers to take care of the environment in their everyday life, and to take care environment in their pilgrim activities (for example, recommending that they walk, ride bike, or carpool when they visit

monasteries);

* to promote the significance of vegetarianism to health and environment and to advocate vegetarianism among Buddhist followers and their families

* to have activities such as reading poems and playing music, and use these kind of art forms to help pilgrims and visitors understand the concept of Buddhist Ecology.

12. ACTIVE USE OF FUNDS, INVESTMENTS and BUSINESSES

We will advocate for investment funds to bring benefit to the communities on environment protection. As one of China's better-developed cities some Buddhist followers and Buddhist monasteries are in a strong financial situation. These people and monasteries could be mobilised to invest in a better environment and to bring benefit to the local residents, or at least not to do any harmful things to the environment in their investments and businesses. For example:

* In the restaurants or hotels or businesses they own, Buddhists should not provide dishes made from parts of wild animals

* In May 2010, the World Expo will be held in Shanghai. The theme is "City, Better Life." In order to fit this theme, with the addition of the element of Buddhism, and to bring honour to the World Expo, the Shanghai Buddhist community should start from the mind to take positive action to protect the environment, including improving both health and the spiritual environment, leading to a more environmentally friendly and civilized lifestyle.