A Buddhist recycling community

The Tzu Chi Foundation

Buddhists in Malaysia practise recycling as a social activity, as part of a worldwide Buddhist recycling campaign.

Discuss before watching

- What kinds of things do you recycle at home or at school?
- How or where is the recycling collected, and by whom?
- Why do you do this (or not)? Do you think of it as fun?

Things to look out for in the video

- anything you already know
- anything you find surprising or shocking

Watch the video (2 mins)

https://youtu.be/lI2-v9xTcgk?si=thods-PawCgvDhpQ&t=208

Begin at 3' 28" and End at 5'26"

Discuss after watching

- Who is doing the recycling and what do they get out of it, personally?

- Whose idea was it to start this project?



Recycling, friendship and community

The Tzu Chi Foundation is one of the largest Buddhist movements in the world. Neither Chan or Pure Land, it is an independent school of Buddhism within the Chinese Mahayana tradition, focusing primarily on community service.

Started in Taiwan in 1966 by its female founder Master Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi began as a local women's project collecting small amounts of money for those in need. Today, it runs secular projects in many countries, informed by Buddhist values, in areas including medicine, disaster relief and education – as well as environmental projects.
https://global.tzuchi.org/we-do_environmental-protection

One particular focus is recycling, and this video clip features the recycling work of Tzu Chi Buddhists in Malaysia. In the video we see an enormous amount of rubbish which has been dumped around areas where people live and work. It looks bad and it may also be harmful to health. Much of it could have been recycled or reused instead of being thrown away.

Tzu Chi's worldwide recycling work began in 1990, when, having driven through a street filled with rubbish, Master Cheng Yen urged her community to start mass recycling. As you see briefly in the video (3:33), she gave a speech in which she encouraged those applauding her to

use their clapping hands to sort materials for recycling instead.

There are now many thousands of Tzu Chi Buddhist volunteers around the world who work together in local groups to collect and sort materials for recycling, or for sale in second hand shops where they can re-sell clothes to raise money to help people in need. As the video explains (at 4' 50"), this means the work is not just about managing waste; it also a social activity, creating opportunities for friendship and enjoyment, especially for elderly people who might otherwise be isolated. As they say in the video:

> *"Recycling centres are THE places to be for the elderly."*
>
> *"Coming to the recycling centre, the elderly no longer feel lonely, realizing life's potential by doing meaningful work."*
>
> *"Recycling centres are homes for the community, fostering family-like bonds…"*

More information about Master Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi and this work:
https://tzuchidharma.org/
https://global.tzuchi.org/we-do_environmental-protection

Some relevant Buddhist teachings

1. Dependent arising/conditionality
2. Karma/kamma
3. The five precepts
4. Exemplification (samanarthata)/samanatthata)

Dependent arising/conditionality and karma/kamma

According to the Buddha's teaching of dependent arising/conditionality, a thing or event happens when all the conditions it depends upon are present. His teaching of karma/kamma is that everything we do, think and say has an effect, on us, others and the world: behaving kindly and generously will have positive, or beneficial, consequences for us and others, while behaving selfishly will have negative, harmful consequences.

Some of the conditions necessary for recycling – or any behaviour which helps the world – are awareness, positive intentions and positive actions.

Find out more in the information sheet Karma and dependent arising.

Exemplification

The Buddha taught the Four Sangrahavastus/ Sangahavattus, four types of behaviour which create community. The last is *samanarthata/ samanatthata,* an ancient Indian word with several meanings including setting a good example and encouraging others by one's own behaviour. Find out more in the information sheet The Four Sangravastus.

Reflect and discuss

Your clothes and you

- Do you have all the clothes you need?
- What makes you want to buy more?
- What do you do with clothes you've outgrown or don't want anymore?
- What do you think or feel about wearing second hand clothes?

The Five Precepts

Behaviour to avoid	Behaviour to develop
Harming living beings	1 loving-kindness
Taking the not-given	2 generosity
Sexual misconduct	3 stillness and contentment
False speech	4 truthful speech
Taking intoxicants that cloud the mind	5 mindfulness, or awareness

More information about the Five Precepts
https://windowsintobuddhism.com/topics-11-16/five-precepts-2/

Reflect and discuss

Reduce, re-use, recycle

Recycling is only the last of three things we can do about waste!

Reducing the amount or number of things we use and re-using things instead of buying new things or throwing them away are the first two, so that there is much less to recycle.

The world needs more people with awareness and compassion, who care about what they do with their waste. Could this be you? If so, what changes might you make? What positive things do you already do, which you can encourage others to do too?

Student activities

1. A woman in the video talks about all the clothes people throw away, some only a year old – some still with price tags on them. (This usually means nobody bought the clothes, so a shop or manufacturer gave them to the second-hand shop to sell.)

Research and give a presentation to the class or write a report about the environmental impact of the worldwide fashion industry and the efforts being made by some fashion brands to reduce harm.

2. Research and give a presentation to the class or write a report about buying second-hand clothes. As part of this, interview staff at a second-hand clothes shop about:

- why they work there
- what they get out of it personally
- where the profits go
- where the clothes they sell come from
- what they do with the clothes they are given which they cannot sell