Bhutan for Life

Bhutan is a Buddhist kingdom in the Himalayas with a far-sighted environmental programme.

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Most of the population of Bhutan is Buddhist and the country's government has a far-sighted environmental sustainability programme called Bhutan for Life. This is part of its commitment to measuring the country's developmental progress according to Gross National Happiness. (See below.)

Discuss before watching

- What does 'carbon neutral' mean?
- What is hydro-electricity? Why is it such an excellent source of electricity?
- What is 'sustainability'?

Things to look out for in the video

- Environmental protection measures
- Anything you find surprising
- Any signs of Buddhism

Watch the video (5 mins)

https://youtu.be/Sxc15AMTkYk

Discuss after watching

- What environmental protection measures are being taken in Bhutan and why?
- What signs of Buddhism did you see in the video?

About this project

Bhutan is a very small and mountainous country in the eastern Himalayas, with a population of less than one million. Most of its people are Vajrayana Buddhist, which is also the state religion. It's one of the 10 most biodiverse regions in the world, where endangered species such as tigers and snow leopards can still be



seen in the wild. Its rivers provide water for a fifth of the world's population and make possible the country's largest export: hydro-electricity.

Most countries' governments measure their countries' prosperity according to Gross National Product: how much money a country earns through producing and selling things. However, since 2008 Bhutan's government has measured the country's prosperity according to Gross National *Happiness* instead. This means that it measures the overall welfare of its people, according to a range of standards including environmental conservation and sustainable socio-economic development.

The Bhutan for Life project is a partnership between the World Wildlife Fund and the Royal Government of Bhutan, supported by donors and partners around the world.

Sixty percent of Bhutan is forest, which is protected by law. This helps the world through the trees' absorption of carbon dioxide – CO2. Half of Bhutan's land is protected from harmful development, but in those areas the government ensures people can earn a living sustainably – through, for example, eco-tourism (see below) and organic farming.

What is 'sustainable socio-economic development'?

'Sustainable' means 'able to continue for a long time.' So sustainable socio-economic development means finding ways to make

money now that do not harm the environment and therefore threaten people's prosperity in the future. One example is eco-tourism, running a tourist industry which brings in enough money to provide local people with a proper income and without building large hotels, cutting down forests or using too much water. Another example is selling the clean energy provided by hydro-electricity.

More information

- https://bfl.org.bt/
- Watch a talk by Bhutan's prime minister: "This country isn't just carbon neutral — it's carbon negative." (19 mins) https://www.worldwildlife.org/projects/bhutan-committed-to-conservation

Some relevant Buddhist teachings

Ahimsa (non-harming)
The Five Precepts
The Noble Eightfold Path
Dependent arising or conditionality (which implies interdependence)
Karma/kamma
The Three Marks of conditioned existence (lakkhanas/lakshanas)
The Five Niyamas or orders of conditionality

See the information sheet **Karma and dependent arising** *for more information.*

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/

Ahimsa

In Pali and Sanskrit, the word ahimsa means, literally, non-harm. Like many spiritual leaders, the Buddha taught what has become known as The Golden Rule: that just as we ourselves do not wish to suffer harm, we should avoid causing harm to others. This takes training: even if we don't mean deliberately to cause harm, all of us behave unkindly sometimes, through simple lack of awareness.

The principle of ahimsa is expressed in the Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts, two sets of training principles offered by the Buddha for those wishing to move towards Enlightenment by developing wisdom and compassion.

The Noble Eightfold Path

1 Right understanding/vision
2 Right intention/emotion
3 Right speech
4 Right action
5 Right livelihood
6 Right effort
7 Right mindfulness
8 Right meditation/concentration

Why take care of our Earth?

Sometimes people talk about "stewardship" of the Earth.

Traditionally a "steward" is someone who has the job of taking care of land and property on behalf of its owner. People who believe in God may believe God has created the Earth and therefore owns it and has entrusted humans with the practical task of taking care of it.

However, Buddhism does not involve belief in a creator God. This means that stewardship is not really a Buddhist concept. Still, Buddhists have other important teachings relating to care of our Earth.

Some Buddhist reasons to take care of the Earth

Buddhism teaches that everything depends on other things. This is the teaching of conditionality or dependent arising. We live in a complex network of people, animals and plants, and all of these depend in various ways on a healthy planet.

The first of the Buddha's five ethical precepts is to avoid causing harm and cultivate kindness. It's an act of kindness to look after the Earth so that people and other living things (and those who come after us) can benefit from a healthy planet.

When we care for things, we become kinder, less greedy, wiser people, expressing awareness, generosity and respect. We cause less suffering to other living things. We become happier!

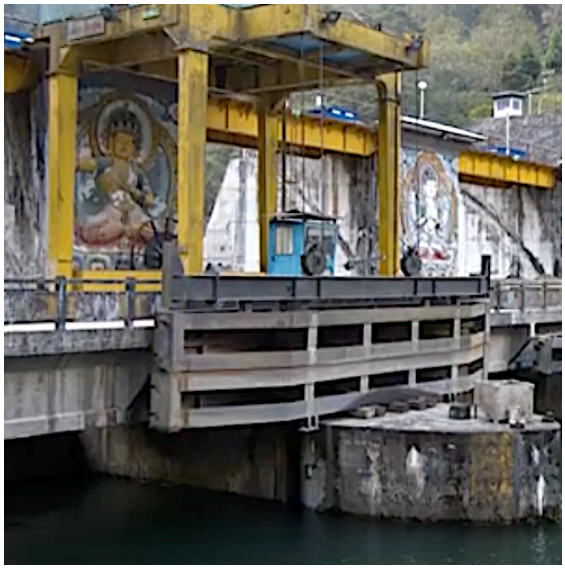
Changing ourselves for the better and benefiting others helps us move gradually towards the perfect wisdom and compassion of Enlightenment.

Reflect and discuss

- Which Buddhist teachings are relevant to this project and how?

Student activity

Did you notice the Buddhist figures painted on the hydro-electric dam in the middle of the video (at 2' 22")? Here are two of them: Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, or Chenrezig as he is known in Bhutan.



Unlike the historical Buddha, they are symbolic, or archetypal, Buddha figures. They represent the enlightened qualities of wisdom and compassion respectively.

On the next page are clearer pictures of Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara/Chenrezig.

Enlightenment is really a state of being beyond description in words, but some Buddhists describe it as the perfect balance of wisdom and compassion.



Manjushri represents wisdom, which for Buddhists means the deepest possible understanding of the Buddha's teachings about reality and the way out of suffering.

He holds a flaming sword over his head – a sword of wisdom, not violence – to destroy people's ignorance of the Buddha's description of reality, the Way Things Really Are, because their ignorance causes suffering for them and others. In the other hand he holds a book, symbolising the Buddha's teachings.



Avalokiteshvara, or Chenrezig, represents compassion for the suffering caused by people not understanding the Buddha's description of the Way Things Really Are. He is often shown with more than two hands, to show his wish to help all suffering beings everywhere.

Student activities

- Find out more about Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara/Chenrezig and think about possible reasons for painting them on a hydro-electric dam.
- Now choose two of the Buddha's teachings you think are relevant to caring for the environment, as well as dependent origination/conditionality and interconnectedness.
- Explain in writing, or in a presentation, some links between these teachings and Bhutan's environmental programme. How does it relate to wisdom and compassion?

Photographs taken in Bhutan, by Munisha.