Holy Isle Centre for World Peace and Health

A Buddhist environmental project in Scotland

In the video look out for

- beliefs and values
- key Buddhist teachings
- what is described as "the greatest project of all" for Buddhists

Watch the video (7.5 mins)

https://youtu.be/k7NxjtRGxMk

Discuss after watching

- What motivates these Buddhists to take care of the island?
- What is 'permaculture'?
- What did you hear about conditionality (or dependent arising) and karma/kamma?
- What did the narrator say was "the greatest project of all" for Buddhists?
- Would you agree that transforming yourself is the most effective way to change the world?

This beautiful and rugged island off the west coast of Scotland has a long history as a sacred place, with an ancient healing spring, the hermit cave of a 6th century Christian monk, and evidence of a 13th century monastery.

Since 1992 the island has been run as the Holy Isle Centre for World Peace and Health, by Buddhists from Samye Ling Monastery in Dumfriesshire, Scotland. It offers a place of peace and beauty for the many hundreds of visitors who come every year, for the day or for courses and short retreats. There's also a private retreat centre for nuns undertaking three-year retreats. You can see the nuns working on this building in the video. (Similar retreats for monks take place elsewhere.)

The conservation programme includes a permaculture garden, the planting of 35,000 native hardwood trees (27,000 had been planted by the time this video was made) and careful management of the island's water, soil, flora and fauna. For further information visit https://www.holyisle.org/the-project/environment/

Student activity

Research the Holy Isle project and give a short presentation about its history and work and the Buddhist values and teachings behind it. https://www.holyisle.org

Reflect and discuss
The vision of the Holy Isle Project

The vision of the Holy Isle Project is described here:
https://www.holyisle.org/the-project/vision/

Open to people of all faiths, the project focuses on three things:

- caring for the natural environment
- world peace
- spirituality and the sacred

What do you think or feel when you hear the words 'spirituality' or 'sacred'?

Which of these three themes do you think is/are most important?

Are they connected? If so, how?

Reflect and discuss
Karma and conditionality

Following his experience of Enlightenment, the Buddha said that he had understood the nature of reality – how things really exist.

What he understood about this is traditionally called *paticcasamupada* (Pali) or *pratitya samutpada* (Sanskrit). Buddhists translate these ancient terms into their own languages in various ways, including, in English, 'conditionality,' 'dependent arising' or 'dependent origination.'

Though he said it was indescribable in words, the Buddha did give some explanation of this principle of conditionality/dependent arising – and he said that it was true of absolutely everything.

Read about it in the information sheet Karma and Dependent Arising on the Topic page "Why Buddhists Care about the Environment."

How might the Buddhists on Holy Isle explain what they are doing, and why, with reference to the teachings of conditionality/dependent arising and karma/kamma?

- Imagine you are living according to the teachings of karma/kamma and conditionality/dependent arising; that you believe deeply that everything depends on other things and you care that everything you do, say and think has an effect on yourself, others and the world.
- How might that lead you to change what you do or some ways in which you behave?
- Does thinking about this teaching make you feel even more committed to behaviours and actions you already consider important?

Student activity

Draw a conditionality web to show many of the ways you are dependent on the natural environment.

Start with yourself in the middle: 'Me.'
Now add things you need every day, such as clothes, food, transport, medicine, etc.

Now add the natural resources they are made from and how they are made: for example, your T-shirt may be made from cotton; where does cotton come from and how is it produced?

Are there ethical questions about the production of any of these things? Do they use a lot of water, for example? Are trees being cut down in order to make them?

Our life is shaped by our mind,
we become what we think.
Suffering follows a negative, unhelpful thought
as 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 positive, helpful thought
like a shadow that never leaves.

The Dhammapada

Reflect and discuss

Do you agree that your life is shaped, or affected, by the way you think? What is your own experience? What happens if you:

- consciously develop a kind, generous attitude to yourself or others; or
- spend time thinking, writing and speaking unkindly and critically about yourself or others?

Reflect and discuss
The Three Root Poisons

After experiencing the perfect wisdom and compassion of Enlightenment, the Buddha said he had seen that unenlightened human beings had three basic unhelpful tendencies.

These 'three poisons' are greed, hatred and delusion/ignorance of the Buddha's understanding of the way things really exist; conditionality and karma/kamma. (They can be seen represented by the cock, snake and pig at the hub of the Wheel of Life.)

If we are not Enlightened yet, it's not our fault that we experience greed, hatred and ignorance. However, it is our responsibility to become more aware when these unhelpful states of mind are present so that we can prevent them affecting the way we behave towards ourselves and others, which causes harm.

With awareness, we can notice how we're feeling and decide to respond with kindness, generosity, contentment and honesty. We can choose to be more aware at any moment, whatever we're doing, but many Buddhists find it helpful to do this by calming and focusing the mind by meditating regularly. There are different ways of doing this, mostly silent; however, some Buddhists use a meditative practice of chanting Buddhist texts.

The Buddha taught that all our actions of body, speech and mind have an effect. Because of conditionality/dependent arising, change will happen anyway, but the teaching of karma/kamma means that we can change for the better and have a positive effect on the world by developing positive habits, responding with greater and greater kindness, generosity and awareness.



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