Change yourself? Change the world?

Five Buddhist teachers from a range of UK traditions respond to environmental concerns

All the speakers are or were Buddhist leaders or teachers in the United Kingdom.

Most Venerable Vajiragnana was head monk at the London Buddhist Vihara and one of the most senior Theravada monks in the UK until his death in 2006.

Reverend Professor K.T. Sato runs the Three Wheels Temple in West London, the first establishment of the Japanese True Pure Land, (Jodo Shin Shu) school in Britain.

Dharmachari Guhyapati is part of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community (previously known as the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order or FWBO). He has devoted much of his life to environmental campaigning.

Reverend Saido was a member of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (Soto Zen) until his death in 2022.

Ani Rinchen Khandro is a nun in the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. When this video was made she was working for the Holy Isle Project and this is where we see her in the video, saying goodbye to some of the Project's many visitors.

Things to look out for in the video

- The key Buddhist teachings they mention
- The differences in what they say
- Anything which particularly strikes you as interesting or curious

Watch the video interviews (11 mins)

https://youtu.be/CVl_ECXgnAE

Reflect and discuss

- Look through the interview transcripts and highlight all the places where the speakers talk about the importance of living more simply, and the harm caused by our wanting and consuming more and more stuff.
- Do you agree or disagree with them?
- What do you think Ani Rinchen means when she says, "everything you need is within you"?
- Do you ever experience 'inner peace'? What does it feel like, or what did you think of it?
- If it was a positive experience, or it sounds attractive to you, how might you make more space for this in your own life? What else caught your attention in the video or transcripts, and why?

Student activity

Try a short meditative 'stilling exercise.' It won't make you a Buddhist but it will give you a sense of what it's like when Buddhists meditate. As you listen, be curious about your experience. Notice physical sensations, emotions and thoughts.

Notice anything you find surprising or strange.

Listen to the guided meditation (7.5 mins)
This can be found in the Environmental Projects section on the Windows Into Buddhism website

Reflect and discuss

What did you notice as you listened to the meditation?
What was enjoyable?
What was unpleasant?



Most Venerable Vajirajnana
London Buddhist Vihara
https://www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/

My main concerns are about destroying forests or cutting down trees, polluting water and air, and sound pollution. All these things affect our lives. I personally feel that we must protect the environment because we are interdependent: we are dependent upon the environment and the environment depends on us. If we disturb the environment, we will suffer the consequences.

We have to educate people to respect the environment, not destroy it, and be in harmony with the environment, be friendly with the environment; in other words to practise metta – loving kindness towards all living beings and living things. We practise the metta bhavana, a meditation on loving-kindness, radiating loving-kindness not only to human beings but to all living things. We encourage people to practise the principle of non-violence.

To protect the environment, we do small things like collecting paper, bottles and tins for recycling. That reduces environmental pollution. Monks were particularly advised by the Buddha not to spoil land, or to spoil water by urinating or spitting in it.

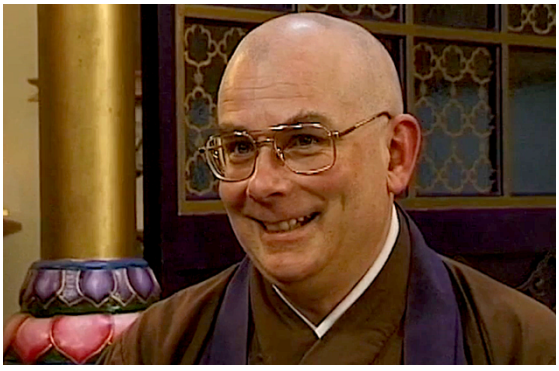
Consumerism encourages people to buy more and more, not to fulfil their needs but to fulfil their greed. People go on and on buying things, producers go on and on producing things, but natural resources are limited. One day all this will come to an end if people are not wise or thoughtful enough about the way that they consume things. All these things contribute to the pollution of the environment.



Reverend Professor Sato
Three Wheels Temple, London
https://threewheels.org.uk/
What concerns me particularly, and what I can do something about, is the purification of our immediate environment: the Buddha shrine and the garden, and on another level, the relationship we enjoy with our friends and neighbours. This is because if our environment becomes soiled it will immediately have an adverse affect on our minds – and vice versa.

Three Wheels is a Buddhist centre where people seek to develop themselves and become pure in mind; peaceful and sincere. The way forward for society on environmental issues is to do as we do when we seek to keep our Buddhist centre always clean and pure. Small as the task may seem, what we can do in daily life is keep our centre as clean as possible. I sweep the street in front of our centre every morning, with a prayer in my mind for global purification.

We have made a Japanese stone garden at Three Wheels. The garden symbolises the Pure Land, the Land of Enlightenment. Many of our friends, both British and Japanese, co-operated in this work. Our motto is 'Harmony within diversity.'



Reverend Saido
Order of Buddhist Contemplatives
https://obcon.org/
If you want to change the world, you can change the part of the world which you can do something about, which is yourself. You can change the way that you are and the way that you act.

What drives us to consume ever more things is a sense of emptiness inside. The solution in the long run is for each individual to work away at dissolving their grasping: the mind that grasps, the mind that craves – the mind that must, must have. It's a bit like the mind of Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*: "We want it! We must have it!" It's that kind of mind which creates the kind of havoc that we see around us and want to do so much about.

You can change *you*. So that means taking the trouble to recycle your bits of paper and separate out the tins and glass. It does actually make a difference if everybody does it. Small individual efforts build up into a very great effect. It's the only way that real change can happen.

With the practice of mindfulness you become much more aware of what you are doing with simple objects, so that you don't treat them quite so carelessly. That extends their life, so you consume less. There are people here who will look at something and have a go at mending it, rather than just tossing it out. That's quite a

challenge and it's really rewarding when it actually works. It's not done as an object in itself. We are not directly involved in environmental issues but because people come here they start to meditate; they are opened up to the compassionate view which is our natural state; they become more sensitive to what they're actually doing and they don't just toss stuff out quite as easily as before.



Dharmachari Guhyapati
Triratna Buddhist Order (formerly the Western Buddhist Order)
https://thebuddhistcentre.com/

I think the most important environmental issue is for us to take more responsibility for our environment. Most of us feel that our immediate environment isn't something that we can look after; it's been taken out of our hands by governments and transnational corporations. The economics of globalisation is a growing problem. It's important that we find ways of localising decision-making processes so that people can be involved directly in taking care of the world that they live in; that we find ways to empower people to take that responsibility.

One of the central concerns of Buddhism is to overcome selfishness. One of the ways we can do this is to recognise that we are interconnected with the world around us. Our bodies are made up of the elements: the earth, the water, the air. So concern with the environment helps us to go beyond self-preoccupation and to open our hearts to become concerned for the world and those around us.

I spend most of my time on environmental and social issues. I'm involved with the Green Party and a number of activist organisations. Some of that work involves helping activists to see how the spiritual dimension can inform their approach to activism; how perhaps they can bring a more non-violent attitude to sometimes quite confrontational situations. I think local communities can begin to come together around issues that concern them. For example, you might be interested in recycling and if recycling facilities aren't provided by your local council maybe you'll petition them for that.

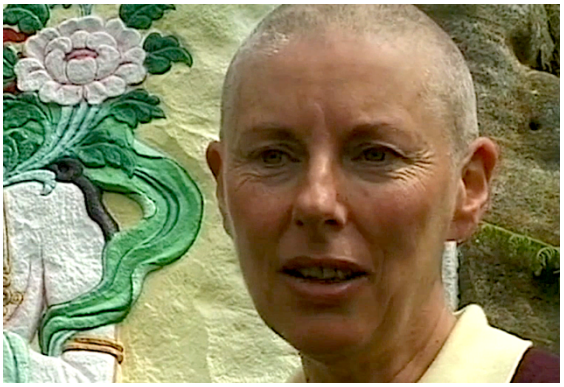
One of the most important things is to learn to live relatively simply, realizing that our happiness is not dependent on accumulating and consuming more and more and that we can find enjoyment and appreciation in fairly simple things.

Ani Rinchen Khandro
The Holy Isle Centre for World Peace and Health
www.holyisle.org

I feel concerned about the environment. If people are concerned about their own happiness and their own well-being they should feel concerned about the environment. We sometimes think we're one thing and the environment is something out there, separate, but we're so interconnected. If you want to be healthy in your mind and body you have to be in a healthy environment.

Environmentally speaking, I think that people have got to become more aware of what they need as opposed to what they want. If we can live more simply, we can sustain our society much more. That is one of the main reasons why we meditate: you find that actually everything you need is within you. When you live more simply you become a lot happier.

It's great that people protest when there's something really bad going on, but at the same time it's important to do something positive and to show an alternative way of being. That's what is so important about Holy Island. Really, the Holy Island Project is all about sustaining a simple but productive and fruitful way of life into the future. So we are not just concerned with Holy Island here and now for our own selves but as pointing a way; it's like a blueprint for others to follow. Because if it can work here then it can work in any other place in the world. So we have a strong environmental programme here.



Our motto is 'The inner peace leads to world peace.' Individually we try to meditate and discover our own inner peace. The mind becomes more stable, more clear and you make contact with your own inner wisdom. If we can do that then it will automatically ripple out to the people around us and right out to the country, to the world.

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