

# Summary of 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

## Introduction

There are more than 100 million Buddhists in China, with more than 13,000 monasteries and around 200,000 monks and nuns. This plan for urban Shanghai, created by the Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai in collaboration with other monasteries, involves 90 temples and monasteries. It is hoped that this will be a model for Buddhists from all over China in creating long-term plans to protect the environment.

The Shanghai Buddhists take the teaching 境由心造 (translated as “our habitat is created by our hearts”) in which it is taught that our environment, far from being external, is *caused* by the “shared action” or “karma” of humankind. 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 this is why the Shanghai Buddhist community has made this long-term commitment to action on the environment.

The plan centres around Buddhism’s teachings about simple living and cherishing your blessings. 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; and calling people to start with small personal actions such as saving water as they wash, saving electricity, and not wasting food.

**The Shanghai Eight Year Plan on Environmental Protection includes:**

### **1. PROMOTING THE ECOLOGICAL THINKING HIDDEN WITHIN OUR TEACHINGS:**

Teachings – including compassionate lifestyles, the ethical codes of service within the community, the principles of following Nature, advocating simplicity and restraining extravagance, the spiritual realm of peace and purity, and the ecological wisdom of harmony between humans and nature – will provide spiritual resources to deal with the current ecological crisis.

Many monasteries in Shanghai run vegetarian restaurants. These restaurants will also become “Buddhist retreat centres”, 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. 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 Civilisation Construction Commission in the Shanghai Municipal Government to form a 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 behaviour 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. We will hold regular environmental lectures and seminars, run Zen “Mind Meditation Camps” including teaching about mindfulness to Nature, and develop educational materials, including a relevant website and a booklet about Buddhism and environmental protection for pilgrims and visitors.

## **3. A SPECIFIC FUND TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT**

Buddhists will set up specific funds for Environment Offices, involving a regular team from the monastery to ensure the environment protection work is regular, systematic, and standardised. This will be carried out in conjunction with the existing programmes recognised by the Shanghai administration.

## **4. THE NON-POLLUTING INCENSE PROGRAMME**

Buddhist monasteries will continue to promote the “Offering of Incense in a Civilised Way” programme. The plan is gradually to change the way offerings have been made for thousands of years by offering locally grown flowers instead of burning incense sticks to pay respect to Buddha. Pilgrims will be educated about this in order to reduce air pollution.

## **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 first stage involves:

- a) **Increasing the “green” elements in the monastery** to beautify the environment. Shanghai monasteries must develop local, achievable Green Strategies such as increasing the numbers of flowers and potted plants inside the monastery grounds. In the longer term, the Shanghai Jade Buddha Monastery could be used as a base to set up a Buddhism and Environmental Education Centre to provide training for other urban Buddhist monasteries in China. The Jade Buddha Monastery’s Environmental Protection Office was launched on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, to create a centre for advocating spiritual environment protection and to raise people’s environmental awareness.
- b) **Adopting green design** in new monastic buildings to save energy and maximise natural light, including using light-coloured or grass-planted roofs to cool down temperatures naturally in summer and exploring solar power for heating the monastery’s rooms and water in winter.
- c) **Encouraging monks, nuns and monastery staff to save energy and water, and use alternative energy sources**
- d) **Recycling, car pooling, reduced pollution, plastic bags and Styrofoam, and sorting waste:** For example, the Jade Buddha monastery has adopted a target of

reducing disposable tableware by 10 per cent every year.

#### **6. PROTECTING THE RIVER**

Buddhist monasteries in Shanghai will extend their involvement in the Mother River Care Project to protect the Suzhou, the mother river of Shanghai. This involves regular clean-ups.

#### **7. PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND RELEASING WILD ANIMALS**

The monasteries will hold more Releasing Lives Ceremonies. This is not just about releasing animals and birds from captivity but also helps awaken the Buddhist sense of compassion to educate believers to respect all sentient beings, and stop cruelty to the natural world.

#### **8. WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT and LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

We will communicate actively with the relevant sections of the community.

#### **9. WORK WITH THE MEDIA**

The monasteries will work with media outlets to spread knowledge about the environment and encourage support for their environmental activities.

#### **10. SET UP AWARDS**

We will set up an annual award in recognition of activities conducted by monasteries in environmental protection.

#### **11. CELEBRATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

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

#### **12. ACTIVE USE OF FUNDS, INVESTMENTS and BUSINESSES**

We will advocate for investment funds to be used in ways that benefit the community in terms of environment protection. As one of China's better-developed cities, some Buddhist followers and Buddhist monasteries are in a strong financial situation.