

TEXT ONLY VERSION

CRY FROM THE FOREST

**A “Buddhism and Ecology”
Community Learning Tool**

“Cry From The Forest”

A Buddhism and Ecology Community Learning Tool.

First edition

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Introduction

During the past decades, development aims in Southeast Asia have mainly focused on economic growth with little consideration of the social, cultural, and environmental – or quality of life – aspects of development. The uncontrolled exploitation of the environment, in particular of natural resources,¹ for short-term private economic gain is resulting in rapid environmental degradation, a loss of respect for traditional values, and a feeling of alienation from family, community, culture, and the land. Buddhism as a belief system and way of life has always promoted traditional community and cultural values and identification with the natural world. In earlier periods, it contributed to what we call a community-based development process that was more reflective of the needs of the people and less damaging to the environment than modern, western-type development. Buddhist principles offer potential solutions for dealing with the problems behind environmental destruction, ranging from the greed which causes people to cut forests legally and illegally for economic gain, or the poverty and alienation which forces villagers to misuse natural resources.

Buddhism in Southeast Asia has had and can have a direct and beneficial effect in promoting a cleaner, healthier environment and saving species of wildlife and forest areas. As part of the moral and cultural fabric of Cambodian life – approximately 90% of the population is Buddhist –, Buddhism can serve as an appropriate medium for teaching and learning about important environmental concepts in order for people and communities to be better able to care for the environment. The Buddhist Wat² has historically been and is once again increasingly becoming the symbolic centre of Cambodian rural communities. It is therefore a suitable and potentially effective channel through which environmental education and awareness programmes can be conducted. Buddhism can assist the Cambodian people adopt sustainable³ development practices and a future where people can live in harmony with nature, their culture, and each other. Moreover, a Buddhist perspective on the environmental crisis can encourage the development of other religious or secular ethical perspectives on the environment in Cambodia.

This book was developed to form part of a non-formal educational programme of environmental education for Cambodian monks facilitated by Cambodian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The goal of the programme is to provide Cambodia's monks, as the natural teachers and guides of the people, the knowledge and learning resources to help preserve and enhance the environment in Cambodia. With technical and financial support from UNDP/ETAP and UNESCO, a consortium of NGOs train and work with a core group of monk master trainers who, in turn, will train and work with a monks from individual wats in the country's provinces and municipalities. The objective is to have the wats in Cambodia initiate and conduct environmental learning and 'doing' activities in their communities.

Buddhism and Ecology

Ecology⁴ refers to the study of the relation of plants and living creatures, including humans, to each other and their surroundings. The study of ecology demonstrates that everything in the environment is inter-related and dependent on each other. An ecological understanding of the environment tells us that the destruction of forests in Cambodia has altered rainfall patterns which in turn has affected agricultural production through more drought and flooding.

¹ Natural Resources: water, trees, minerals, wildlife, and plants in nature that is of value to human life

² Wat: pagoda, or temple-monastery compound

³ Sustainable: Meeting the needs of the present without weakening the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

⁴ The term "ecology" is derived from the Greek word *Oikos* meaning "home" or "habitat"

Buddhism embraces a view of reality called “dependent origination,” or *paticca samuppada* in Pali (also known as the Buddhist law of conditionality), in which all parts of the universe, living and non-living, are understood as being inter-related and inter-dependent. In other words, nothing exists by itself but only in relation to other things on Earth and in the universe. The environment means “the surroundings.” In practical terms this means YOU as a human organism and the human, natural, and cultural “worlds” which surround you. The *paticca samuppada* principle emphasizes the need for co-existence between all parts of the environment, and encourages a respect for and tolerance of every human being and living thing sharing the planet. Human beings are thus not viewed as separate from, but as a part of the environment. If the environment is destroyed, man cannot live and by abusing nature or one’s culture, humans abuse themselves. However, if people respect and treat the environment with compassion and consideration, the well-being of human-beings is ensured. As the spiritual leader of Cambodian Buddhism, Samdech Preah Maha Goshananda, stated, **People and forests are connected. If we take care of ourselves we will take care of the forests and the forests will care for us in return.**⁵

Buddhist Stories and their Relationship to the Environment

Since early times, Buddhist commentators have used illustrative stories as a method of interpreting and explaining the teachings of the Buddha. The *Dhammapada*, an anthology of 423 Sayings of the Buddha in verse, is such an example of a large collection of legends and folk tales which illustrate the meaning of a particular word or passage.

When we look at these traditional Buddhist texts, there appears to be very little direct reference to what would now be called environmental or ecological ideas and concerns. The reason for this is that the world in which the Buddha lived and taught was essentially one of harmony between all parts of the environment. Environmental education simply wasn’t needed. But many of the descriptions outlined in Buddhist stories serve to remind us how nature once was, and how much of the natural world we have now lost. The stories frequently refer to forest dwelling and meditation in natural surroundings. The strong connection that people once felt with nature is illustrated in the story of the Buddha’s life, in which the most significant events occurred in rural settings and were associated with trees.

In addition, Buddhist stories often contain rich symbolism⁶ associated in part with many species of plants and animals. Many of the Buddha’s teachings use examples and comparisons from nature to convey important moral messages. Animals are portrayed with great sympathy and understanding. Some animals, such as the elephant, the horse and the mythical naga, are used to personify great qualities. The stories are intended to teach people the importance of high virtue, in which men often show themselves as inferior to the animals. The function is to teach a moral lesson by allegory⁷, and to illustrate the position animals occupy side by side with people in the Buddhist world view.

Based on these foundations, this book has extracted some Buddhist legends and folk tales in order to convey an environmental ethic⁸. Although this was not the original intention of the stories, they often outline a moral code for correct behaviour which today can be interpreted as a way of life that would be beneficial to the environment. The stories are intended to provoke discussion about the environment, particularly environmental problems that affect your local community, and to stimulate ideas about how the Buddhist community can play an active role in promoting environmental awareness as means toward achieving healthy, beautiful environment in which to live.

⁵ Quoted at the Seminar on Buddhism and Environmental Protection, Svay Rieng Province, Feb 20-23 1995

⁶ Symbolism: use of an image to represent something else

⁷ Allegory: where characters or events in a story or picture are used to symbolise moral standards

⁸ Ethic: system of moral principles

The Role of the Sangha in Environmental Education

Conservation and protection of the environment is not only the responsibility of the government, but also the people living and working in rural and urban communities. The Buddhist Sangha is in a position to be able to spread environmental knowledge throughout a community. Buddhist monks (and nuns) can help to the people to improve their awareness, attitudes, and actions on the environment in their own community. Based on the principles of self-help and self-reliance, local problems can and should be solved by local people, and the local Buddhist wat can assist, as it has traditionally done, by giving guidance, advice, and encouragement.

Such involvement by Buddhists in society is now known as “socially engaged Buddhism.” It calls for the traditional Buddhist ideals of wisdom and compassion to be applied in social service and practical action. The role of the Buddhist wats in the promotion of initiatives for the broader needs of the community has gained increasing popularity in Southeast Asia over recent years. In Cambodia, the movement builds on the original role of the Buddhist wat, which evolved also as an educational and social service center for the local communities.

As respected leaders and role models in society, the monks can play a crucial role in the conservation of their local environments. Monks and nuns living in rural districts often share a common view of life with the villagers. They can influence the lives of the communities through example and help to create awareness of the impact human beings can have on nature and society, and their responsibility to protect them and use its resources carefully.

How to Use this Book

This community learning text is designed to serve as a non-formal education tool for teachers in a wat community working with the local population served by the wat. The text may also be used in other community settings facilitated where possible by community-based NGOs (non-governmental organisations). It aims to develop better understanding among people a) concerning the concept of the environment from a Buddhist perspective; b) about the degree and causes of environmental degradation in Cambodia and elsewhere; and c) as a means to provide ideas for practical actions inspired by Buddhist principles and methods to solve environmental problems within local communities.

The book is divided into seven sections on the following topics:

Environmental Education
Buddhist Way of Life = Good Environment
Creating a Sustainable Environment
Preserving Natural Resources
The Value of Forests
Valuing Animals and Wildlife
Avoiding Pollution and Waste

Each of the sections relates to and is interdependent with the other sections. Many of the ideas which are discussed in one section can be applied to issues raised elsewhere in the book. The stories and environmental issues contained in the book are intended to promote discussion and awareness in your community which will hopefully lead to a search for solutions to environmental problems.

This book sets out to raise awareness about the environment and provide the foundations on which environmental knowledge and activities to protect and improve the environment can be built. Much of this environmental knowledge already lies in the traditional wisdom in your community. It is hoped that this learning tool will help to bring this traditional wisdom out and thereby foster better attitudes towards the environment and its conservation. It is hoped as well that it will help to develop skills for identifying, investigating, and solving environmental problems at the local community level. As a community-based learning tool, the success of this book depends on the participation of community members at all levels. All the people in the community need to

work together towards the understanding and resolution of environmental problems so that the quality of lives will improve.

Following are some important points to the community teacher, acting as a group facilitator, using this text:

- 1) Each section consists of several short texts which can be read, or better, retold in your own words to people who have come to the wat to learn about Buddhism and the environment. The text is followed by a series of questions for group discussion.
- 2) The layout of the book allows for the illustrations to be shown to the learners while the stories are read and discussed. Visual elements can be useful in engaging peoples' imagination and in stimulating discussion based on the group members' experiences.
- 3) At the end of each section are practical activities intended to reinforce the lessons learned and to encourage further exploration into environmental issues and concerns. The exercises are adaptable to groups of varying size, age range, and learning abilities. They can also be used as exercises organised by teachers, monks, and nuns for community groups or school children.
- 4) Examples are given of environmental projects initiated by Buddhist communities in both Cambodia and Thailand, and suggestions are offered for future environmental work from a Buddhist standpoint.
- 5) A bibliography is included to encourage further research into the topics raised.

SECTION ONE

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

1a. The Lotus and Environmental Education

When the Lord Buddha achieved enlightenment, a god-king called Sahampati Brahma, invited him to come and preach to all the creatures. But the Lord Buddha was reluctant to teach

the *Dhamma*⁹ to creatures dependent on sensual pleasures as they would be unable to understand. However, Sahampati Brahma nonetheless urged him to preach the *Dhamma*, reasoning that there existed some who could understand. Beings were as varied as lotuses, he said. Some carried only a small amount of dust in their eyes, while others had a thick layer of it. There were those with developed faculties of faith, exertion, mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom, as well as those with such faculties still under-developed. In the same way, some lotuses lived submerged under the water, while others rose to water level, or even rose above it. Hence the *Dhamma* would be more, or less, beneficial to people in proportion to their capacity for understanding. The lotus which rises out of the water is like the person who has listened intently and understood quickly. The lotus that has reached the surface of the water and is going to bloom tomorrow is like the person who has listened and is beginning to understand. The exception is those people who could not be taught because they would not listen. These people are likened to lotuses under the water that are eaten by the fish and tortoises.

If we are to consider environmental education in this way, we see that it is important to educate as many people as possible about the environment. Through education we can help to change peoples' attitudes and the way they lead their lives. Promoting environmental issues can be demoralising at times, particularly when there appears to be little we can do about the environmental destruction caused by authorities or foreign companies. However, the wise people will listen and understand, and the more people who are aware, the greater the chance we have of preventing future environmental destruction.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. *Within your community, which people do you think will be the most receptive to environmental education? Which people would be the least receptive?***
- 2. *What are reasons for people being willing to learn? What are reasons for people being unwilling to learn?***
- 3. *How can the lotus as a symbol of purification promote environmental learning? [ex. Purification of the mind (inner purification) leads to a learning process for the purification of the environment (outer purification)]***

⁹ Dhamma: teachings of the Buddha

1b. Environmental Wisdom

The *Sutta Nipata* is an early Buddhist text concerning the value of knowing nature. The Buddha says:

Know ye the grasses and the trees...Then know ye the worms, and the moths, and the different sorts of ants...Know ye also the four-footed animals small and great, the serpents, the fish which range in the water, the birds that are borne along on wings and move through the air...Know ye the marks that constitute species are theirs, and their species are manifold.

The primary goal of environmental education is to enable people to understand and appreciate the surroundings in which they live as well as environmental issues. Lack of understanding about the environment is a main factor which contributes to pollution and destruction. The more awareness people have of the causes and effects of environmental degradation, the more motivation and commitment they may have to respond in a positive way. By understanding the workings of nature, such as rainfall patterns, soil types, and the uses of plants and trees, farmers can get better returns from their agricultural pursuits.

We can learn a great deal from communities who continue to live in close contact with their environment. People in rural Cambodian communities have accumulated knowledge about their local environment in order to survive and live in harmony with the natural and cultural environment. Their knowledge includes knowing where the resources are, when they can collect these resources and how much they can use of each resource. They know which plants or trees can be used for food, medicine, or handicrafts. Such environmental knowledge is founded on generations of experimentation and observation. This local knowledge is a form of environmental wisdom. It is essential to seek out this wisdom as a way of dealing with the pressures placed on the environment by modern development.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What are the main characteristics of your surrounding local environment? How many plants, trees, animals, and can you recognise and name?**
- 2. Consult with elders in your community who can identify the vegetation and wildlife you are unable to name.**
- 3. Discuss ways in which your community can help school children learn about their surrounding environment.**

1c. The Partridge, the Monkey, and the Elephant

Once there was a large Banyan tree on a slope of the Himalayas. Three friends lived near it -- a partridge, a monkey, and an elephant. They lived courteously, politely, and with deference for one another. One day, they decided to discover who was the eldest among them. The elephant remembered that when he was young the top-most shoots of the Banyan brushed against his belly. The monkey remembered that when he was young, having sat down on the ground, he was able to eat the topmost shoots of this Banyan. The partridge remembered that he had once eaten one of the fruits from a great Banyan elsewhere, and had later relieved himself in an open space from where the present Banyan tree later sprouted. Thus the partridge was the eldest, and subsequently both the monkey and the elephant paid their respect and honour to the partridge and followed his advice. On the advice of the partridge, all of them undertook the five moral precepts and lived courteously and in respect of one another. After their deaths they rose to the heavenly world (*Tittira Jataka*).

This story was told by the Buddha as an example to teach the monks that living in a community requires respect for seniority, courteousness, politeness, and deference. It serves as a reminder that the different generations in a community have different experiences to relate. Thus all members of a community can contribute their knowledge as a resource for the benefit of the whole community. For example, elder members of a community tend to have a wealth of knowledge about their local environment and cultural heritage. Such knowledge can be passed on to the younger generations in a community. They can contribute to the continued wise management of a community's natural resources and reinforce local systems of value and meaning.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Who are the elders of your community? Who are the younger members of your community?**
- 1. How do you think their knowledge and experience of the local environment differ?**
- 2. How much of the traditional knowledge of the older people is being passed on to the younger people?**
- 3. How can the wat serve as a transmitter of local knowledge and wisdom?**

ACTIVITIES

Getting to know your environment

Objectives: to investigate and familiarise the learning group with the local environment and to identify community resource persons.

Activities:

- Divide into small groups;
- Each group should collect, or be provided with, six different natural products found in the local environment, for example, fallen leaves, seeds, fruits, twigs, animal dung;
- Each group is given time to discuss the items they have in front of them;
- How much do they know about the items - what tree, plant, animal etc. is the item from, is it common to the area, what is it used for (to eat, for medicine etc.)?
- If there is time, the groups can move around from one set of items to the next, until each group has discussed all the groups of found items;
- Discuss your findings as a large group;
- Who knows the most?
- Discuss where or from whom you learnt about the natural products
 - observation
 - parents
 - video, radio, newspapers
 - friends
 - monks/nuns
 - teachers
 - books
 - other

Follow-up Activity

- Paste the found natural products onto a large sheet of paper or an empty wall;
- Label each object with the information you have gathered;
- Continue to add further information as you find it out, and add new items of interest;
- Ask other members of the community for information about what you have found.

SECTION TWO

**BUDDHIST WAY OF LIFE
= GOOD ENVIRONMENT**

2a. The Dhamma and the Environment

The main teaching of the *Dhamma*, the Buddha's teachings on the moral law of nature, is based on the Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering is a central fact of life (*dukkha*)
2. Understanding the causes of suffering (*samudaya*)
3. Knowing that there is cessation of suffering (*nirodha*)
4. Knowing how to attain cessation of suffering by practicing the middle way of morality (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*).

The Buddha taught that greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) provide the basis for all our problems and suffering. This awareness brings about the realisation that people have a responsibility, not only from country to country and human to human, but also from human to other forms of life. The *Dhamma* states that nothing exists by itself, and that all forms of life are interconnected and depend on each other to survive and prosper. Humanity is viewed as an integral part of the environment, so that when the environment is harmed in some way, people also suffer.

The five Buddhist precepts (*panca sila*) are the minimum requirement for good conduct. Traditionally they are known in the negative form of not killing, not stealing, not abusing objects of sensual pleasure, not lying and not taking intoxicating substances. However, they can also be interpreted in a positive sense of compassion, generosity and honesty, personal strength and responsibility, truth and communication, health and mindfulness.

By following the *Dhamma* in general and the *panca sila* in particular, Buddhists can contribute towards the development of an attitude of responsibility and mindfulness, where people come to realise that the plundering of the environmental, in particular natural resources, for their own use is destructive to other people and the country as a whole. To care for nature is to care for all things in the world as they are, rather than as they are useful or as we might like them to be.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Discuss each of the five precepts and the ways they can be interpreted as positive steps towards conserving and protecting the environment.**
2. **Pick an environmental problem affecting Cambodia as a whole, or your community. Discuss the problem in the terms of the Dhamma -**
 - What is the suffering resulting from the problem?
 - What is the cause of the problem and resultant suffering?
 - How can the problem be solved?
 - What practical steps can be taken to overcome the problem/suffering?

2b. The Dhammayietra

Dhammayietra, which means “Pilgrimage for Truth,” are walks that are part of the age-old Buddhist tradition in Cambodia. Initiated by the Dhammayietra Centre, these Buddhist walks for peace and reconciliation are a clear statement that the Buddhism has an important role to play in the development process in Cambodia.. The actions of the monks and nuns participating in the Dhammayietra gives a positive role model to communities throughout the country-wide. The Dhammayietra demonstrates how Cambodian Buddhist monks and nuns can work in non-violent ways to aid their suffering countrymen.

During the Dhammayietra from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh on the eve of the Cambodian elections in May 1993, the participants became acutely aware of the environmental destruction caused by excessive logging. In response, trees were planted in temples along the route. There have been many annual Dhammayietras since 1992, and tree planting has been a common feature of each of these annual walks. Bodhi tree seedlings donated by Sri Lanka were planted during the 1992 Dhammayietra. The Dhammayietras, with simple acts of walking, listening, water blessings and messages of peace and reconciliation, have brought hope and inspiration to the communities they have passed through. The inspiration and leadership for the Dhammayietras has come from Samdech Preah Maha Goshananda who advised,

When we respect the environment, then nature will be good to us. The trees are like our mother and father. They feed us and nourish us: provide us with everything - the fruit, the leaves, the branches, the trunk; they give us food and satisfy many of our needs. But if we just cut down the trees it won't rain anymore. The trees make it rain. So on the Dhammayietra we are spreading the dhamma of protecting ourselves and protecting our environment, which is the dhamma of the Buddha.¹⁰

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Besides tree planting, what other activities to protect and improve the environment do you think could be initiated on the Dhammayietra?**
- 2. What roles can monks, nuns, and achars play in wats in order to spread the environmental message to a wider audience from the Dhammayietra route?**

¹⁰ *Seeds of Peace*, Vol 10, No.3

2c. Community Development through a Buddhist Wat

Buddhist Wats are situated in or near villages and have served as the focus of not only religious ceremonies, but also village social and cultural life. Wats have traditionally served as community learning centres, although this tradition has been disrupted in recent decades by the social and political unrest and the influx of western values. Nonetheless, Wats are once again beginning to take on the role of community centres, and have begun to play an exemplary and educational role in promoting self-help activities to improve the quality of community life. Community roads, pre-schools, savings & credit groups, rice banks and have been created by villagers through community development activities guided by monks. This improvement of the quality of life includes the preservation of the environment. This can include environmental awareness education and activities to improve the environment in, around, and beyond the Wat.

In recent years, Cambodian Wats have increasingly been the venue for training sessions, workshops or seminars involving the local community. For example, the Khmer-Buddhist Educational Assistance Project (KEAP), a local NGO in Battambang province, implemented a Buddhism and Environmental Awareness training programme between April and September 1994.¹¹ A group of nearly two dozen monks, achars [lay wat leaders], teachers, and lay community leaders from four district Wats in Battambang province were involved in the training. The purpose of the project was to promote Wat-connected learning and practical action on environmental awareness as a way of reaching out to and engaging the surrounding population in environmental activities. A community theatre group in one Wat was trained and performed in the other wats to educate the local population on the need to protect the forests and maintain a healthy environment. Extensive tree planting was conducted in and around the four participating Wats by the participants and people in the Wat community.

Questions for Discussion

1. ***Ask the elders in your community to explain the education activities your Wat conducted in the past. What role can your wat play in organizing community training sessions or workshops on local development issues? cultural issues? environmental issues?***
2. ***Discuss ideas for environmental education activities that could take place at your Wat. (You may be able to add more ideas when you have completed this book). Here are some suggestions:***
 - ***working with school children to establish a programme of planting and caring for tree seedlings in the wat or school;***
 - ***holding training sessions for local people on local environmental issues;***
 - ***holding tesna on protecting and improving the local environment;***
 - ***convening an environmental study group for the local community.***

¹¹ Ministry of Environment, *State of the Environment in Cambodia 1994*. Phnom Penh: UNDP, 1995

2d. Watarams

The Buddha held that nature has qualities of beauty and serenity which could inspire the spirit and be conducive to meditation. The Buddha himself encouraged his benefactors to build monasteries in natural settings. One of the earliest monasteries offered to the Buddha was the *Veluvanarama* in Rajagaha, the capital of the Kingdom of Magadha in India. Its name means the “bamboo temple” as it was located in a grove of bamboo (*velu*) trees. The Pali word, *Vihara*, which signifies the Buddhist temple, means “an open place in the forest.”

Many Buddhist Wats in Cambodia have been built along the banks of rivers, surrounded by forests, or on hilltops where the air, earth, and water enhance spiritual life. It is commonly believed and practiced that the land or river-front belonging to a monastery is *abhyadana*, or a protected area, which becomes a sanctuary for the birds and animals that live there. The temple buildings are often surrounded by plants, flowers, ponds, and trees to create a garden of peace for contemplation (*samadhi*) and enjoyment. Such pagodas are called *Watarams*.

In recent years, many monks in Cambodia’s Wats have led tree planting activities in order to re-create or improve their *watarams*. A Khmer Buddhist tradition since the reign of King Sisowath (1904 -1927) has been to plant Koki trees (*Hopea Odorata*) in temple grounds. In Thailand, monasteries in the forests have often played a role in preserving large areas of forest land around or near the monastery. They can play a similar role in Cambodia. Similarly, burial grounds have helped to conserve the environment as respect for ancestors has encouraged people not to destroy the surrounding gardens or forest.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Discuss the local environment inside and around your Wat.**
 - ***In what ways can the environment be improved?***
 - ***Do birds or animals reside at your Wat? If so, which ones? Are they long term residents or do they visit at particular times of the year? If not, what could be done to bring them back?***
2. **What suggestions can be made to the head monk and Wat committee to make your Wat a more suitable environment for people and wildlife – a *Wataram*.**

2e. Seasonal Cycles and the Buddhist Way

In the *Vinaya Pitaka I*, the Buddha promulgated the rule against going on a journey during the rainy season in part because of possible injury to the worms and insects that came to the surface in wet weather. This rule serves to remind monks of compassion toward all living beings. The Sangha still follows this rule, and during the period of the rainy season the monks enter *Coul Vessa* where for three to four months, from July until October, they must remain in the pagoda grounds. In Cambodia, this tradition also ensures that rice seedlings are not trampled on. Toward the end of the *Vessa*, the Buddhist holiday of *Pchum Ben* is celebrated for 15 days to commemorate one's ancestors and make food offerings to the monks. After *Ceng Vessa*, the end of the retreat, monks are again able to wander, collect alms, and travel to their home districts.

The observances of monastic life often closely reflect the seasonal cycles of nature and agriculture. Buddhist festivals, the weekly holy days (*T'ngay Sil*), and the biweekly monks' recitation of the *Patimokkha* in the temple occur in accordance to the lunar calendar. These observances and the monastic way of life reminds people of the close relationship between Buddhism, nature, and the environment as a whole.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What other Buddhist traditions and festivals reflect the seasonal cycles of nature and agriculture?**
- 2. Often, the original meanings of traditions and festivals are forgotten over time. Discuss to what extent your community is aware of the festivals it observes. Discuss ways in which your Wat can help to understand and promote the Buddhist festivals and other cultural traditions.**

2f. Environmental Awareness through the Pali Language

The ancient Pali language, the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism, can be a useful tool with which to raise environmental awareness. The term *parithan* in Khmer derives from the Pali *paritta*, which means “protection, to safeguard.” The region in which we live, mainland Southeast Asia – consisting of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam – was known as *Suvannabhumi*, or the “golden land” in Pali. Old, venerated trees are referred to by Buddhists as *vanaspati* in Pali, which means “lords of the forest.”

Similarly, the Pali names of many Cambodian provinces or districts recall the natural or cultural features of that particular area. These can serve as suitable reminders of the environmental importance of these places. Ratanakiri means “mountain of gems,” which aptly describes the natural landscape of this province: abundant natural forest cover, volcanic crater lakes, stones & minerals, and rich soils. Mondolkiri derives from *mandalagiri*, which means “surrounded by rocks or mountains.” Sambor, from the Pali word *sampheakboreak*, means “plentiful” or “bountiful,” which has obvious connections to the abundant natural resources of the area: the flooded forests, the fish spawning grounds, the bird life, and the Mekong dolphins. Another example is Pursat, the province in northwestern Cambodia. Pursat is said to derive from Bo-thi-satva, the floating Bodhi tree that floated against the water current, after which the tree was taken to be planted in a place called Bo-ro-sat.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Consider place names in the area where you live for any connections they may have to the local environment.**
2. **Are the natural resources, wildlife, or cultural artefacts (such as monuments) that gave the place that name still evident?**
3. **Are there any trees in your area that are Vanaspati? If not, can your community identify long-standing trees that may become Vanaspati?**

2g. The Lotus as a Symbol

The lotus plant has always been a popular symbol of purification in Buddhism. Its flower rising above the muddy waters is symbolic of beings that have risen above greed, hatred, and delusion. Lotus flowers are still popular offerings to present at Buddhist ceremonies, in particular during *Visakh Bochea*, which celebrates the birth, *paribanna*, and enlightenment of the Buddha. Lotus flowers are often depicted in Buddhist art, and lotus ponds can frequently be found in temple grounds. Immediately after his birth, the Buddha is said to have taken seven steps northwards, walking on lotus blossoms that sprang up beneath his feet. The symbolic value attached to lotus flowers has helped to protect different species of lotuses in Buddhist countries.

The Cambodian ceremony *Bon Phka* (flower ceremony) involves Buddhist lay people giving donations of money to assist the local Wat carry out repairs, build, or to fund community projects. The money is traditionally attached to trees to resemble flowering blossoms. This ceremony, which can be held throughout the year, is perhaps derived from the story of King Serey Lanka, who sent a monks' robe adorned with 300 silver coins, to the Buddhist monk Moha Botumathera, in recognition of the way the monk used flowers to worship the Buddhist statues. In Thailand, the *Phapa* ceremony is similar to the Cambodian *Bon Phka*. It has been successfully adapted to secure money for tree seedlings and other community environmental projects. The *Bon Phka* ceremony in Cambodia could also be adapted to raise money for projects to improve the environment – and thereby the quality of life -- of local communities.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Over the last few years, what projects has your Wat supported with proceeds from *Bon Phka*?**
- 2. What environmental activities or projects could you initiate in your community using the proceeds from *Bon Phka*?**

2h. Tree “Ordination”

The monk ordination ceremony is usually performed for men as a ritual signifying their entrance into monkhood. However, in recent years the ceremony has been adapted to sanctify trees. In 1998, monks on the Dhammayietra symbolically ordained a tree in Ratanakiri province. Buddhist monks “ordain” trees by tying a saffron robe around the trunks to signify the sacredness of all trees. The abbot of Wat Bodharama in northern Thailand is generally credited with being the first to adopt the ordination ritual to sanctify trees. He developed the ritual as a tool to educate people about the environmental importance of the forest and the dangers of logging.

The abbot explained:

If a tree is wrapped in saffron robes, no one would dare cut it down. So I thought that perhaps this idea could be used to discourage logging, and I began performing ceremonies on trees in the forest near the temple. I called the ritual an ordination to give it more weight. The term “tree ordination” sounds weird to Thai people since an ordination is a ritual applied only to men. This weirdness has helped spread the news by word of mouth.¹²

The abbot proved successful in drawing attention to the environmental destruction caused by logging in his area, and the Thai government imposed a logging ban the following year due in part to the his effort. Other monks have since adopted tree ordination as a means of preserving the forests. These monks have been given the title “ecology monks” because of their environmental work. Rituals such as tree ordination can serve as a focal point to emphasise the urgency of preserving natural resources, and as a way of teaching about the inter-relationships between Buddhism, nature, and the environmental as a whole.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Would tree ordination be an appropriate ceremony to preserve important trees in your community? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages.**
- 2. Can you think of other Buddhist ceremonies that would be appropriate for promoting the conservation of trees in your community?**

¹² Cited in: *Seeds of Peace*, Vol.11, No.1, 1992

ACTIVITIES

Good Environment: Buddhist Way of Life

1. Objective: To consider ways in which Buddhist practices, traditions, ceremonies and the Buddhist Wat can help to preserve the local environment.

2. Activities:

As an individual or a small group, pick one of the chapters within this section. Write down why it interests you and consider ways in which you can follow it up through an activity in your community.

Here are some suggestions for such activities:

- Create a tree nursery in your Wat
- Label important trees in your Wat or nearby forest in Pali with a Khmer translation
- Organise for an environmental workshop to be held at your Wat.

3. Steps:

- In small groups discuss and list practical ways in which to help preserve the environment through the Wat, drawing on Buddhist practices, traditions, and ceremonies;
- After the small group discussions, meet as a larger group and share your ideas;
- Decide on the activities the group feels are most suitable for your community and pick two or three of these activities which the group feels they can carry out within the next six months
- *As a large group, draw a six month work-plan on a large sheet of paper or blackboard. Mark in the important Buddhist days and ceremonies.*
- Write down, from week to week and month to month, the environmental activities the group will carry out within this six month period.

Remember to include an estimate of how long the activity will take, who will be responsible for the activity, who will be involved from the community, and what the group hopes to achieve from this activity.

4. Follow-up:

- Toward the end of the first six months, meet again as a group to discuss and evaluate progress. Some of the activities may be completed, some may continue over the next six months, some activities may have been unsuccessful.
- Discuss the reasons why an activity was not successful and think of solutions or alternative methods.
- Draw a work-plan for the next six months. Fill in the activities to be continued and any new activities.

SECTION THREE

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

3a. A Suitable Environment

The Buddha's view on the relationship between man and nature finds expression in his principle of "right livelihood," one of the paths in Buddha's doctrine on the Eight-fold Path to Enlightenment. In the *Mangala Suttanta*, where the Buddha lists the ideal factors conducive of the well-being of an individual, he mentions one as "to reside in a suitable locality" (or environment).

A people's way of life is shaped by the environment in which they live. The environment, which includes people, nature, and society/culture, differs from country to country and region to region. A people's cultural identity develops in response to differing local environments. Cambodia is a country with a population consisting of mainly rural and urban Khmer, but also contains Chinese, Vietnamese, Chams¹³, indigenous¹⁴ highlanders and other ethnic groups. Each group thrives within a particular environment, adding a rich cultural diversity to the rich ecological diversity of Cambodia.

The destruction of natural habitats¹⁵ is often accompanied by the degradation of the environment as a whole, thus making the environment unsuitable for living. The ways of life, language, traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, and identity of the communities who live in these habitats are damaged or destroyed. Equally, the decline of certain ways of life, such as rural society, is often accompanied by the destruction of the habitat which supported them. This results in people becoming displaced and disoriented in their lives as well as a loss of knowledge about this habitat. By preserving natural habitats, we preserve the environment, including ourselves.

Questions for Discussion

1. ***Discuss the ways in which your life is influenced by the surrounding natural environment. Here are some suggestions of topics for discussion:***
 - ***clothing***
 - ***handicrafts***
 - ***food***
 - ***housing***
 - ***festivals***
 - ***local customs and beliefs***
2. ***How does your life differ from people living elsewhere in Cambodia?***
3. ***Discuss how your local environment has changed over the last ten years. How have these changes affected the way people in your community lead their lives?***

¹³ Cham: Cambodian Muslims descended from the ancient Kingdom of Champa or from Malaysia

¹⁴ Indigenous: Belonging naturally. Indigenous people are generally considered to be the original inhabitants of the land on which they have lived for centuries. Indigenous groups in Cambodia include the Tampuan, Kreung, Jarai, Kavet, Kachok, Brao and Phnong

¹⁵ Habitat: the natural environment of an animal, plant, human being, etc.

3b. The Life of the Buddha

Most of the Buddha's life was spent in natural surroundings. The Buddha was born more than 2,500 years ago under a sal tree in Lumpini Garden, near Kapilavatthu, a Himalayan Kingdom in the north of India. His early experiences of meditation took place beneath the rose apple tree, and his enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree on the banks of the Neranjara river in the Indian Kingdom of Magadha. His first sermon took place in a forested deer park, whereby he converted five ascetics and thereby established the first Sangha. His death (*Parinibbana*) took place in Salavana park between twin sal trees (*shorea robusta*). In one account, the trees were said to burst into bloom, even though it was not the flowering season.

The time in which the Buddha lived was different much less urbanised than the one we live in today. However, it is worth remembering that the Buddha made the decision to leave his luxurious and protected life in the royal palace when he was confronted with the suffering of the outside world. From that moment on he decided to remain in the outside world and seek knowledge and truth. Many people have, unlike the Buddha, shut themselves off from the outside world, seeking only to fulfill their own immediate needs and desires. It is easy to accept money in exchange for timber if we do not see or think about the suffering caused to the communities who live in and rely on forests to survive. The same can be said for the animals who lose their natural habitats; fish who lose their breeding grounds as the rivers become full of silt; families who become malnourished from lack of rice, fish, or agricultural produce.

The story of the Buddha's life illustrates how important it is for people to remember that they themselves are part of the environment. Improving the environment to make our communities a better place to live in depends not on others, but on ourselves, including you and me.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Discuss actions which you or members of your community do that may be harmful to the environment. How do these actions cause suffering?**
- 2. Discuss practical ways in which you can inform people of the suffering caused by their actions.**

3c. Water, the Source of Life

Animals need to live near water to survive. Similarly, the first priority for any human settlement is to find a nearby water source which can sustain the lives of the people. Buddhism regards water as one of the four great elements (*mahâbhûta*) forming the physical world. The Buddha, despite living in a world where natural resources were in abundance, made his disciples aware of the importance of protecting and conserving water sources. He criticised monks who used water thoughtlessly, and praised those who built wells and water ponds for their communities.

The sacredness of water is illustrated in the way it is used to bless people during Buddhist ceremonies. As the element that can extinguish fire, known as the element of destruction, water is symbolic of peace and reconciliation.

Cambodia has a unique hydrological¹⁶ system consisting of the Tonle Sap lake and river and the Mekong river. During the wet season the Tonle Sap lake acts as a buffer for the flood waters of the Mekong river. The water of the Mekong pushes northwards up the Tonle Sap river and empties into the lake. After the monsoon period, the process is reversed. The lake and the rivers provide the Cambodian people with their water and fish, supports the agricultural system and provides for transportation. The *Bon Om Tuk* (Water Festival), held at the close of the rainy season, provides an opportunity for the Cambodian people to pay their respects and appreciation for this vital water system. Water is an important symbol for the Cambodians which has penetrated into their culture, language, and way of thinking and living. Drawing on this symbol helps Cambodians to heed the Buddha's injunction to protect and preserve water sources for all the people and animals.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Where and what are the main water sources for your community?**
- 2. In what ways does your community use the local water resources?**
- 3. What local festivals or customs in your community recognise the importance of these water sources?**
- 4. Try to find out information and stories (from elders or from books) about the Tonle Sap lake and the Cambodian river systems.**

¹⁶ Hydrological: water-based

3d. Local Beliefs and Customs

Buddhism has always been among the most tolerant of the world religions. A Buddhist contribution to environmental preservation should therefore emphasise the need for co-existence with other religions and beliefs. In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha says that as long as people respect the other religious beliefs and old holy places, the social environment will be healthy. In 1997, the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh organized a regional seminar on environmental ethics that included contributions from Muslims in Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia as well as indigenous and highland peoples' perspectives from Thailand, Philippines, and Cambodia.

Buddhism in Cambodia and neighbouring countries also co-exists peacefully with folk beliefs based on guardian spirits (*Neak Ta*) and ancestor worship. Because these beliefs often play such an important role in maintaining harmony between the people and nature, they also contribute to the preservation of the environment. If such deeply-held traditional beliefs are ignored or considered "backwards," people will feel alienated and less likely to listen to new ideas or co-operate in environmental activities. Buddhism can help to demonstrate the valuable role old traditions and beliefs can have in the modern world. Many Wats in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and other countries still contain shrines to local gods and spirits. The most successful ecology monks are those who establish a close relationship with local villagers, and respect the local peoples knowledge and beliefs.

In Nan province in Thailand, the abbot Phra Kru Pitak Nantakhum is aware of the importance of the spiritual beliefs among the farmers of his home village. He has opened ways to incorporate those beliefs into environmental projects. The day before a village tree ordination ceremony [see p. 22], the villagers held a ceremony for the tree spirit, informing it about the ordination right and requesting its assistance in protecting the forest. In this case, local beliefs and Buddhism worked side by side to protect the forest, making the project acceptable to and involving all the people.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What local beliefs and customs does your community have? What shrines to local gods or spirits, if any, are in your wat?**
- 2. Discuss how these beliefs have, or could, contribute towards the preservation of the environment in your community.**

3e. The Parrot and the Fig Tree

Once upon a time many parrots lived in a grove of fig trees. When the fruits of the tree in which he lived had withered away, the king parrot ate whatever he found remaining. He was very happy and contented and remained where he was. Sakka, king of the gods, determined to put him to the test. By his supernatural power, he withered up the tree. Perceiving that this made no difference at all to the parrot, he disguised himself as a royal goose, and went to the parrot to ask him why he delighted in a tree that was withered and rotten. The parrot replied, "This tree has been good to me in the past. Why should I desert it now?" Thereupon Sakka caused the tree to bloom anew and to bear fruit.

This story from the *Maha Sukha Jataka* illustrates the notion of gratitude as the king-parrot refuses to forsake a tree which has been his home. Similarly, people also develop a sense of affinity with the local environments where they live. Rural Cambodians and highland peoples have managed their natural resources by traditional methods developed through experience of living in close contact with their environment. If that familiar environment is destroyed or removed, the harmony between humans, nature, and culture is disrupted or destroyed. The relocation of communities from traditional homelands as a result of large-scale economic development projects or long civil strife also have a negative impact on the environment. Once moved from traditional homelands, communities tend to lose their sense of affinity with their surrounding environment. Their customary observances become disrupted. This often results in the degradation of the new environment. The need to rebuild their livelihoods in new, unfamiliar places also tends to create social problems and poverty. This in turn frequently leads to unsustainable resource management practices as people struggle to generate income and a livelihood.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Identify people in your community who have moved from their original homeland to your area. What problems have these people encountered? Does their attitude towards the local environment differ from that of community members who have lived in the area for a long time?**
- 2. How can the community encourage new members to get to know their new environment better?**

3f. Merit-making through Donation of Parks

The open air, natural habitats, and trees, flowers, and plants have a special fascination for Buddhists as symbols of freedom and nature unhampered by man's activity. There were many parks and pleasure groves built in Buddha's time. In Jetavana in the Kingdom of Kosala, a rich man named Anathapindika sought to buy a certain grove of trees for the Buddha which belonged to Prince Jeta. At first the Prince didn't want to sell the land, and set a huge price -- the number of gold pieces needed to cover the land. Anathapindika attempted to do this, and on seeing his good intentions, Prince Jeta repented and donated the land on which Anathapindika built a monastery. The Buddha spent most of his rainy season retreats in this park, and both the Prince and Anathapindika achieved happiness in their next life. In the *Samyutta Nikaya* the Buddha says:

Planters of groves and fruitful trees, and they who build causeway and dam, and wells construct and watering sheds, and (to the homeless) shelter give: Of such as these by day and night for ever doth the merit grow. In righteousness and virtue's might such folk from earth to heaven go.

The construction of parks and groves for public use continues to be considered a deed of great merit. The actions of Buddhists, past and present, in donating parks has contributed greatly to the preservation of areas of natural beauty or cultural significance. Watarams are themselves beautiful gardens of peace and sanctuaries not only for people, but also animals. Wat Chas in Kampong Cham has recently been working to renew its 10 hectares of land into a public park. Also, Cambodia was the first country in South-east Asia to establish a National Park when the temples of Angkor and the surrounding forests were declared a protected area in 1925. On a smaller scale, the creation of parks in cities and towns has helped to make these urban environments more pleasant places to live and work.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Discuss why you think it is important for people to have parks and natural areas. What environmental value do such parks have?**
- 2. Is there an area of land within your locality that could be developed into a community park?**

ACTIVITIES

Objective: To consider the problems, environmental and social, caused when people are in an unfamiliar or unsuitable environment, and to investigate ways to solve these problems.

Activity:

Divide the group into two smaller groups. Give each group one of the case studies below and ask them to read, discuss, and try to solve the given problems.

CASE STUDY 1

Sokhan was born in Phnom Penh and lived there for sixteen years. After the death of his father, Sokhan's mother decided to move back to the village of her birth. Her parents still lived in the village and led a simple life farming a small paddy field and raising pigs. When they arrived in the village, Sokhan was horrified to see how poor his grandparents were, how small their house was, and how dirty the village itself was. He missed his school friends and their motorbikes, he missed going to the cinema and watching TV, he missed shopping at the markets for the latest clothes, and he felt lonely and miserable. His mother became very worried and decided to go to the local Wat to ask the monks for their advice.

What advice would you give Sokhan's mother?

CASE STUDY 2

Sam Yi had lived in the same village for all of her fifty years. Her family had made their living for generations by growing vegetables which they sold at the local village market. Because the land where her village was situated was rich and fertile, a wealthy businessman from Phnom Penh decided to buy all the land and farm oil palm. The villagers were persuaded to sell their land and to move to another site near to the Wat. The land here was different and Sam Yi found she could no longer grow vegetables. The villagers felt they had been cheated as all the money they had been given for their old land was used up, and they felt they had no way to support themselves and their families. Sam Yi decides to visit the local Wat to ask for advice.

What advice would you give Sam Yi?

- Once the small groups have discussed the case studies, meet as a larger group to present each groups findings or conclusions;
- Discuss the findings and ideas within the larger group.

SECTION FOUR

PRESERVING NATURAL RESOURCES

4a. Using of Natural Resources

In the Buddhist tradition, a householder should accumulate wealth as a bee collects pollen from a flower. The bee harms neither the beauty nor the fragrance of the flower, but gathers pollen to turn it into sweet honey. Similarly, human-beings should take resources from nature without damaging the environment. As the *Dhammapada* suggests,

*As a bee without harming the flower, its colour
or scent, flies away, collecting only the honey,
even so should the sage wander in the village.*

A natural resource is something that exists in nature and is of value to human life. Water, forests, minerals and plants are all examples of natural resources. Natural resources are often renewable. Fish and trees, for example, will continue to be produced by nature so long as we use these resources in a sustainable way. However, many of the environmental problems we are experiencing around the world and in Cambodia are caused by the unsustainable human use of the earth's resources. The resources are placed under increasing pressure to provide for the industrial and urban needs of the consumer society. Resources become judged solely by their economic worth rather than their life-support capacity.

Many modern methods of extracting resources are harmful to the environment. As the demand for natural resources increases, new technologies are developed to enable more resources to be extracted at a quicker rate. Thus the spade is replaced by the bulldozer, the axe by the chainsaw, the fishing net by explosives. Such methods are able to extract the resources at a greater rate than the renewal process, leading to the scarcity of resources and the degradation of the environment.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. How does your community collect natural resources?**
- 2. Which methods of collecting natural resources in your community are damaging to the environment?**
- 3. Are there alternative, more sustainable methods which could be used instead?**
- 4. Discuss ways of earning income without harming others.**

4b. The Four Habitual Practices

The very first teaching for those entering monkhood is, in Pali, *Cattara Nissaya Dhamma*, the Four Habitual Practices. These are: to wander round for alms; to wear simple, used clothes; to live at the bases of trees; and to use natural medicines (herbs as well as urine). Although they sound exaggerated in a modern context, they demonstrate the Buddha's intentions for monks to live simply, economically, and along with nature. They serve as a reminder that man has to depend on nature for many of their needs including food, clothing and shelter. This contrasts greatly with the concept of consumerism,¹⁷ which follows the notion of satisfying one's desires with no sense of limits.

Over the last decade, the population of urban areas in Cambodia has grown. Urbanism surrounds people in a man-made environment and cuts them off from their natural environment. An urban society promotes consumerism, and resources become reduced to monetary value alone. Trees, fish, and minerals become commodities that can be exploited for exchange within the market economy. It is important to remember that all Cambodians, whether rural or urban, are ultimately dependent on the natural resources the country provides. Natural resources can be converted into money, but money cannot replace the natural environment.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Which natural resources are most highly valued by your community?**
- 2. Are the resources valued for their monetary value or because they satisfy local needs?**
- 3. Who receives the benefits from the resources valued for their monetary worth? Who receives the benefits from the resources without monetary value?**
- 4. Pick one natural resource in your community, (e.g. a tree, a water source, a mineral, an animal), and discuss the reasons why that resource is valuable to the community other than for its monetary value.**

¹⁷ Consumerism: exaggerated buying of goods and services in a cash economy

4c. The Merchants and the Banyan Tree

In the Varanasi region in India, a group of merchants decided to rest under a large Banyan tree which offered them cool shade. While they were resting, they noticed that the eastern branches were dripping with water, and so decided to cut the branches in order to drink and bathe in the water. Suddenly, the branches on the southern side were seen to hold rice and meat, and they quickly cut those branches in order to satisfy their hunger. After that, twenty-five girls appeared on the western branches and the merchants cut the branches and satisfied their desires. The merchants then looked to the remaining northern branches, where precious stones began to appear. The merchants cut the branches and filled their bags with the stones. The merchants couldn't believe their luck, and in their greed decided to cut the base of the tree in the hope of more good fortune. At this moment twenty-five nagas appeared in armour, together with 300 soldiers with cross-bows and 6,000 soldiers with protective shields. The merchants were terrified and raised their hands in homage and apology. All the merchants but one were killed, their bodies turned to ashes. From that moment on, the surviving merchant laid down rules banning his servants and other people from cutting trees.

This story illustrates the Buddhist belief that greed changes nature, and the natural processes can be affected by the moral character of human-beings. Buddhism believes that although change is an inherent factor in nature, the moral deterioration of human society accelerates the process of changes which are adverse to human well-being and happiness. Thus Buddhism maintains that there is a close link between man's morals and the quality of the environment and life. Humans should use natural resources to satisfy their basic needs. Once we start exploiting resources for greed, the environment and the quality of life of the people as a whole suffer.

*The tree that gives you pleasant shade
to sit or lie at need, you should not tear
it's branches down, a cruel wanton deed.
(The Jataka, Vol. IV)*

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What resources in your community are used to satisfy basic needs?**
- 2. What resources are used for greed?**
- 3. Is there a difference in the availability of resources depending on whether they are harvested for need or greed? If so, discuss the reasons for this.**

4d. Fruits: the Proper Use of Tree Products

The early Buddhist community lived mainly in the forest, surviving on forest products such as fruit. Forest trees and plants played an important role in serving the needs of the monks for food, construction materials, and medicines. However, the Buddha preached that one must be mindful of what is taken from the forest. King Seniya Bimpisara of Magadha, India, once offered a group of Buddhist monks the mangoes in his park, but some of the monks picked all the mangoes, leaving not one fruit on the trees. Their actions were criticised by local people for not being moderate. When the Lord Buddha heard of this incident, he laid down a rule against such an excessive act. He proclaimed that monks could only eat fruit that is picked from the ground, or if it is damaged by fire, a knife, the finger nails, or if the fruit is seedless, or the seeds have already been discharged. This rule, though a code for monks, can be understood as a general rule on how one should avail oneself of the fruits of nature. Another story tells of the Buddha being offered a mango and then giving the seeds back to the farmer to be replanted.

Malva nuts are a special fruit which grow in the north-east of Cambodia. They are eaten with sugar as a desert. Traditionally, Malva nuts have been collected after they have fallen to the ground, or the fruit is picked by climbing the tree. However, as the demand and price for Malva nuts has rapidly increased over the last years, more and more villagers are harvesting the fruit by cutting the trees down so that all the fruit can be collected at once. Such practices will limit the availability of this fruit in future years.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What fruits grow in your community?**
- 2. How often are the fruits harvested?**
- 3. Are the methods of harvesting sustainable?**
- 4. Discuss ways in which you can help to promote the sustainable harvesting of fruit.**

4e. The Value of Forest Products

The Lord Buddha permitted monks to use forest products, such as roots, bulbs, stems, branches, bark, leaves, fruits, flowers, and resins, for curing monks who were sick. In recognition of the essential role plants and vegetables play in the life of human beings and other organisms, the Buddha taught that plant life should not be destroyed. In the strict monastic rules he set down in the *Anguttara-Nikaya*, the Buddha states that monks are not allowed to injure plant life in any way.

He is one who abstains from injury to seed-life and plant-life...Abandoning the taint of ill-will; with heart free from ill-will he abides having regard for the welfare and feeling compassion for every living thing; he cleanses his heart of the taint of ill-will.

Communities in many parts of Cambodia still rely on forest products to supplement their livelihoods. Forest foods such as herbs, honey, leaves, tubers, fruits and small wildlife provide important proteins and minerals into local diets, and are often used for medicines. Bamboo and rattan have numerous uses by communities for the construction of houses, water-pipes, animal and fish traps, cooking equipment, handicrafts and mats and fencing. These communities are aware of the value of forest products to their lives and tend to use these forest resources carefully so that they maintain a constant supply. Uprooting plants or cutting down fruit trees to obtain the fruit will result in fewer resources for the following year.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What forest products does your community use?**
- 2. Are forest products used wisely, in a sustainable way, in your community?**
- 3. Discuss how the systems for collection and management of the forest products could be improved?**

ACTIVITIES

The Use of Natural Resources

Objective: to identify the natural resources being used by your community and to consider the ways in which these resources are extracted.

Activities:

- Discuss which natural resources are used by your community
- Discuss how the natural resources are being extracted
- What effect do these methods have on the environment and the availability of these resources?
- What can we do to promote sustainable resource extraction?

*This activity can be done in groups, with each group producing a chart:
For example:*

Resources	Extraction method	Effects	Solutions

- Discuss your results as a whole group and identify steps that can be undertaken by the community to improve the sustainable use of natural resources

SECTION FIVE

THE VALUE OF FORESTS

5a. The Value of Forests

After the Buddha-to-be renounced the world, leaving his royal surroundings for homelessness, he spent much of his life in forests, inhabiting caves and sheltering under various trees. In the *Rukkha Sutta*, the Buddha praised those who sat at the foot of trees, desired seclusion and had few needs. He knew that peace and solitude helps one gain concentration to contemplate ones mind. It also enables a monk to see the natural progression of forest life; young green stems, ripe fruit and leaves, and finally dry leaves falling from the tree, and to compare it with the natural passage of life for people - birth, followed by youth, maturity, old age, and death.

A verse in the *Dhammapada* speaks of the value of forests in the following manner:

*Delightful are the forests
Where ordinary people find no pleasure.
There the passionless will rejoice,
For they seek no sensual pleasures.*

Although they are disappearing fast, forests are still central to the livelihoods of the Cambodian people and are Cambodia's main natural resource. Forests promote and catch rainfall which helps to prevent soil erosion. They absorb sunlight and carbon dioxide and produce oxygen for the atmosphere so that humans and animals can breathe. They help to keep the atmosphere cool. They provide habitat and food for animals and birds. They help to reduce noise and air pollution. They provide villagers with a vast array of local economic benefits including household fuelwood, foods, construction materials, and medicines. Such a precious natural resource has to be treated with respect and consideration. The destruction of Cambodia's forests through the over-use of resources or logging has serious implications for agriculture, and hence the well-being of the people and the country.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Discuss what benefits forests have for your local community. You may want to list the benefits under the following headings:**
 - **environmental**
 - **social**
 - **spiritual and cultural**
 - **economic**
2. **Discuss ways in which you can make your community more aware of the different values of the forests in Cambodia.**

5b. Significant Trees in the Life of the Buddha

Significant trees are mentioned throughout the life of the Buddha. He was born under the Sala tree while his mother was travelling to Lumpini. At the most important time of his life, when he obtained enlightenment and thereby became the Buddha, he was seated under the bodhi tree (Bo tree). Even after the enlightenment He spent seven days under the same Bodhi tree in meditation on His blissful achievement. He spent a second week contemplating the Bodhi tree from a distance. The Buddha then spent the next week under a banyan tree named *ajapala nigrodha*. After seven days he went south to another tree called *rajayatana*, where he again spent seven days. After spending 45 years wandering in the forest, travelling from one village to another, preaching *Dhamma* to the people, he chose to pass away between the Sala trees in the Sala grove at the small town of Kusinara.

All these tree species are now highly respected by Buddhists all over the world in reverence to the Buddha. Huge trees such as the ironwood, the sala, and the fig are also recognised as the Bodhi trees of former Buddhas. The direct positive result of this attitude is the conservation of these important species. The Bodhi tree (*Daem Po*) in particular, has been protected and replanted again and again wherever Buddhism has taken root. Its association with Buddhism has given it the Latin scientific name *ficus religiosa*.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. How many trees of importance can you identify in or around your community?**
- 2. Are these trees recognised by your community as being important Buddhist trees?**
- 3. Discuss ways in which you can raise community awareness of the importance of these trees.**

5c. The Bodhi Tree

The word *Bodhi* means enlightenment, as it was under the Bodhi tree that the Lord Buddha achieved his enlightenment. The Buddhas of the past also attained enlightenment under different species of Bodhi trees. The former Buddha, Kakusandha attained enlightenment under the great Sirisa Bodhi tree (*Chres*), the former Buddha Konagamana under the Udumbara Bodhi tree (*Lovea*), and the Former Buddha Kassapa under the Nigrodha Bodhi tree (*Chrey*). The present Buddha, Gotama, obtained enlightenment under the Assatha tree (*Banyan*), and the Future Buddha, Methaya (*Maitreiya*), will achieve enlightenment under the Naga Bodhi tree (*Khdng*).

The importance of the Bodhi tree is outlined in the Scripture of *Mahapari Nipanasutta*. The people of Savathy region worshipped at a pagoda in Jetavana, and placed their perfumed offerings and garlands by the door of Gandha Kuti. A rich man, Anathapindhika, knew of this and went to see the monk Ananda, who in turn questioned the Lord Buddha about the appropriateness of these actions. The Lord Buddha replied that the true stupas worthy of worship are the Saririka stupa (a stupa where the Buddha's remains are enshrined), the Paribhogika stupa (a stupa where items used by the Buddha are enshrined) and the Uddesika stupa (a stupa for concentration). But he said that the one stupa that could be respected at all times was the Bodhi tree. At once Ananda asked the Lord Buddha for seedlings of the Bodhi tree in Gaya so that he could cultivate the trees by the door of the pagoda in Jetavana. A venerable monk, Moggalana, brought ripe fruits from stems of the Bodhi tree to the pagoda, and in the afternoon the seedlings were planted in a gold container. The Bodhi tree cultivated from the seedlings was called the Ananda Bodhi.

Since this time, Bodhi trees have been considered sacred, and are conserved and preserved throughout Buddhist countries. King Norodom brought the Great Bodhi Tree from Sri Lanka to Cambodia in 2430 of the Buddhist era (1887). The tree was planted in front of Wat Botum in Phnom Penh, where it still stands today. During the first Dhammayietra in 1992, Bodhi tree seedlings were donated from Sri Lanka and planted at pagodas along the route.

Questions for Discussion

1. ***Does your Wat have a Bodhi tree? How old is it? Where did the seedling for the tree come from?***
2. ***Discuss ways in which you can draw attention to the importance of the Bodhi tree in your community.***

5d. Community Forestry

The concept of a “community forest” has long been a part of the Buddhist tradition. A community forest develops when local people care for and manage a forest on which they depend for parts of their livelihood. People use the forest in a sustainable way so that it remains a natural resource for a long time to come. Community forestry can also involve reforesting a degraded forest or planting and caring for young trees within the community, such as at Wats and schools.

Community forestry projects can be initiated through the Sangha. The Venerable Monk, Nhem Kim Teng, formed the *Santi Sena* (Peace Army) in Svay Rieng province to undertake environmental preservation. A community forest, Prei Chumka Koki 1 in Chantrea district, was developed, integrating Buddhist and traditional community beliefs, in order to protect and regenerate this particular area of forest. The villagers received training about environmental awareness and the importance of protecting and replanting the forest. The project helped to enhance the villager’s appreciation of the value of the forest, in addition to regenerating forest areas in an area of few natural resources. Monks, the wat, and the Sangha can help to initiate such community projects and assist with the organising of community meetings, work schedules, and conflict resolution when appropriate.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. *Is there an area in your community that could be designated as a community forest?***
- 2. *Discuss ways in which you could help your community set up a community forest.***
- 3. *Discuss what benefits and problems a community forest can provide to your community?***
- 4. *Discuss ways in which problems of a community forest could be resolved.***

5e. The Monk and the Tree Spirit

Once upon a time, a monk of Alavi decided to build himself a hut (*Kuti*), and so set about to cut down a tree. The tree-spirit residing in the tree begged him to stop but he refused. The spirit, thinking that the sight of her child would touch the monk, placed her child on a branch of the tree. However, the monk, unable to check the force of his upraised axe, cut off the arm of the child. The tree-spirit managed to retain her anger and impulse to kill the monk, and reported the matter to the Buddha. The Buddha commended her for her self-restraint and assigned her another tree in which to live. (*Vinaya Pacittiya*)

The Buddha took this occasion to lay down upon monks the observance of the precept regarding the injuring of plants and trees. It is an interesting story because it informs us how people, even monks, often learn environmental lessons through experience. The full implications of acts which are destructive to the environment are frequently only realised after damage has been done. The image of the tree spirit (*Thevoda*) has often been used in environmental campaigns in Buddhist countries to encourage people to respect the forests and abandon destructive practices. It reminds us of how ancient spiritual beliefs may provide for the protection of nature. Many rural and indigenous people in Cambodia believe that the natural world is inhabited by powerful beings, often referred to as spirits (*Neak Ta*). These spirits have to be respected and revered as they are believed to have the power to influence the health, well-being, and prosperity of villages. Old forest areas surrounding villages are frequently believed to be inhabited by powerful forest spirits, and it is forbidden for these areas to be cut. Because these community-based sacred sites and “spirit forests” are taboo to human interference, they provide an important contribution to the conservation of the environment.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Which trees in your community trees are inhabited by deities or spirits?**
- 2. Have these beliefs helped to protect areas of forest within your community?**
- 3. Discuss how Buddhist deities and spirits can be further employed in environmental awareness materials and activities.**

ACTIVITIES

Objectives: to consider the value of the forest in terms of economic, environmental, cultural, and social benefits.

Activities:

- Split into groups of four and provide each group with a large sheet of paper with a picture of a tree.
- Each group is given one of the following topics: economic benefits, environmental benefits, cultural benefits, and social benefits.
- Ask each group to discuss the value of the tree in terms of their given topic. They can write or draw the different benefits on the drawing of the tree.
- Re-group as one large group, and ask the different groups to present their ideas.

Forests or Deserts?

Objectives: to consider the implications of large-scale logging

Activities:

- Split into two groups and provide each group with a large sheet of paper.
- Ask one group to draw an imaginary landscape where all the trees have been cut down. Ask the second group to draw an imaginary landscape which has forested areas.
- Regroup and discuss and compare the two pictures

SECTION SIX

UNDERSTANDING ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

6a. Wildlife and Forests

Forests are often described in Buddhist stories as being the natural abode of animals, from the very smallest insect, to the beautiful large wild animals. A Buddhist legend tells of a wood-man who was going about his daily work of chopping wood. The Buddha, who was passing by, stopped to explain that the work of the wood-man was killing the ants which were living in the wood. The Buddha preached a sermon on reverence for life and the wood-man left his axe and joined the Sangha. This story reminds us that cutting down a tree not only destroys the tree, but also destroys the habitat of the many different animals, birds, insects, and plants which live in or around trees.

Another verse in the *Jatakas* speaks of the relationship between the tigers and the forests.

*Come back, O Tigers! To the wood again,
And let it not be levelled with the plain;
For, without you, the axe will lay it low;
You, without it, forever homeless go.*

Cambodia in the 1990s has been experiencing one of the highest rates of deforestation of any country in the world. Forest cover, estimated to be around 73% in 1970, is now believed to be less than 40% and disappearing fast. One of the many implications of this deforestation is an increasing scarcity of natural habitat for wildlife. Extensive logging in Snoul district, Kratie province, for example, has resulted in much of the wildlife seeking refuge in areas of remaining forest in Mondolkiri province. However, such areas are becoming harder to find and wildlife numbers are decreasing rapidly in the Kingdom.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Find and discuss with people in your community who remember what animals lived in the forests in earlier times. Which of these animals have disappeared and which remain? Discuss the reasons for their disappearance.**
- 2. Discuss ways in which wildlife could revive and prosper in your region.**

6b. The Compassion of Buddha Towards Animals

The Lord Buddha promoted compassion for all living creatures. The first precept, not to kill sentient beings, is based on compassion, which is the central force in the spirit of Buddhism. This precept supports the idea of conservation of animals. A gentle and non-violent attitude towards all animals, large and small, is a source of merit needed for human beings to improve their good karma in the cycle of rebirths (*samsara*). As in many Buddhist countries, wats in Cambodia have often looked after unwanted animals such as dogs and cats and have also been served as wildlife sanctuaries and animal hospitals. Once, while the Buddha was collecting alms in the city of Savatthi, he saw a group of boys teasing a snake. When he asked why the boys were teasing the snake, they replied it was because the snakes bite them. The Buddha then preached the following:

All creatures that have been born always want true happiness and goodness; those who seek happiness by threatening others through their power, abandon this world and will never achieve true happiness. All who have been born want to be happy; those who seek happiness without threatening others through power abandon this world and always achieve true happiness.

Dhammapada-Sukhavagga

Animals have often been treated cruelly for the purpose of man since early times. The bas-reliefs of the Bayon temple in Angkor depict men engaged in the sport of cock-fighting. Today, some popular hotels and restaurants have wild animals chained or caged at their entrance as a sign of good fortune or status. Such treatment of animals is both cruel and unnecessary.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Discuss the ways in which animals are mistreated in your community.**
2. **Discuss how can you help the people in your community develop attitudes of compassion and responsibility towards animals?**

6c. Elephants in Buddhism

The elephant plays a significant role throughout the life of the Buddha. In Buddhism the elephant is a symbol of endurance, strength, and restraint. In Cambodia the walls of temples are often illustrated with pictures of elephants serving the Buddha. The elephant, particularly the white elephant, has been closely linked with Buddhism and the Cambodian monarchy, thus making it an important unifying symbol in Khmer culture.

The Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) himself came to his mother, Queen Maha Maya, in the form of a white elephant. Another well known elephant story from the *Vinaya Pitaka* involves Devadatta, the Buddha's evil disciple, who made many attempts to eliminate the Buddha. Devadatta instigated Prince Ajatasatru to send a savage elephant, Nalagiri, to a place where the Buddha was expected to pass by, so that the animal could gore him with his tusks and trample him underfoot. But on the contrary, at the sight of the Master, the elephant became quite gentle and in going up to him, brushed the dust from the sacred robes with his trunk. The Buddha thanked Devadatta for sending the elephant to pay homage to him.

Today the elephant is also favoured by Buddhist people because of its cleverness, strength, and patience and for its services in agriculture and transportation. However, the number of elephants in Cambodia today has drastically declined due to lack of natural habitat and poaching. In some countries people have promoted certain animals for protection such as the Giant Panda in China. In Cambodia the elephant could become a suitable symbol for promoting wildlife protection.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Discuss why the think the elephant has been so important in Cambodian history?
Discuss the good qualities of this great animal.**
- 2. Discuss the dangers that are facing the elephant population at the moment and what measures could be taken to protect the elephant.**

6d. The Elephant hunter and the Noble Elephant

In Benares, India, there was an elephant hunter who made a living by killing elephants and marketing their tusks, claws, entrails, and flesh. In a certain forest several thousand elephants lived. One day, when they went to the forest they saw some Paccekabuddhas (private, individual Buddhas). From that day on, both coming and going, they paid their respects to the Buddhas before proceeding on their way. The elephant hunter saw these elephants and thought that if he also got a yellow robe he would be able to trick the elephants and kill them. Thus he stole some robes and sat down with a bow and arrow, the robe pulled over his head. Each day the elephants paid their respects to him and passed on their way, and each time the hunter surprised the final elephant and killed him. After taking the tusks and other valuable parts, he buried the bodies in the ground. Some time later, the Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be), who had been reborn as an elephant, became the leader of this herd. He began to notice that the herd was getting smaller and so one day decided to take up the rear of the herd. As always, the hunter jumped out and fired an arrow, but the Future Buddha stepped backwards avoiding the arrow. Addressing the hunter, he said:

You have put on robes that become those who are free from passions, but which are unbecoming to you. In doing such a deed as this, you have committed a grievous sin.

This story conveys the concept of falsehood. Most of the hunting of wild animals in Cambodia today is done illegally for monetary gain, with rare species being exported across the border to Thailand, China, and Vietnam. This trade in wildlife and related products is becoming a major threat to several species of animals including the tiger, leopard, sun bear, and monitor lizard. These animal populations are rapidly decreasing as a result of hunting and poaching, and through the degradation of natural habitats caused by large-scale logging.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What wildlife is killed in your community for money? If you are unsure, visit the local market and see which species are being traded.**
- 2. What is the wildlife being sold for? (ex. skins, medicine, export etc.)**
- 3. Discuss ways in which your wat community can inform people about the consequences of the wildlife trade on Cambodia's wildlife population and the harm this does to the environment as a whole.**

6e. The Story of Sovanna Sam

In a story told in the *Jatakas*, Sovanna Sam was a young boy who lived in a mountainous forest. He devoted his life to serving his blind parents, Nukol Pandith and Parika. Each day, he collected water and food for them from the forest. He grew to know and was loved by the forest deer. One day, King Pilayakha, while hunting, accidentally shot Sovanna Sam who was standing close to the deer. The dying Sovanna Sam wanted to know why the King had shot him and the King lied, replying that the boy was at fault for frightening the deer. Sovanna Sam told the King that from early childhood even the wildest animals were not frightened of him and that he came to the forest every day to collect food and water from the forest. The King was touched by his story and admitted that he was the one at fault. He called on a goddess to help him. The goddess told the King that he must take care of Sovanna Sam's blind parents. The goddess also eventually brought Sovanna Sam back to life.

Until recently, wildlife habitats in Cambodia had been relatively undisturbed by human activities. People led a much simpler life which encroached less on the territory of wildlife. Today increasing pressure is being put on these habitats by logging, poaching, and the clearing of land for economic development projects such as large scale agriculture and the creation of large reservoirs for hydro-electric power.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Discuss ways in which your community is encroaching on wildlife habitats.**
- 2. Discuss what solutions there may be for protecting wildlife habitats from human encroachment.**
- 3. How can the wat community actively help to preserve wildlife habitats within the local community?**

6f. The Man Who Ate Bird's Eggs

Once upon a time, Prince Bodhi, in a previous life, ate some bird's eggs and was destined to remain childless all his life. The story goes that several hundred people put to sea in a large vessel. When they reached mid ocean, they suffered ship-wreck and all on board lost their lives with the exception of two people, a husband and wife. They clung to a plank and escaped to a neighbouring island. On this island there was a large flock of birds. The husband and wife, overcome with hunger and seeing nothing else to eat, cooked the eggs of these birds over a bed of coals and ate them. When the eggs proved insufficient to satisfy their hunger, they caught the young of these birds and ate them. Neither of them were heedful of their actions. The Buddha told the Prince that if he had been more heedful in his former existence he would have been able to produce a son or daughter.

Cambodia's extensive wetlands¹⁸ provide an ideal habitat and breeding ground for many species of water birds. Prek Toal, a flooded forest on the Tonle Sap lake, is one of these areas where many large water birds, such as the black-headed Ibis (kgnakhlbonsar), greater adjutant storks (tradakthom), grey-headed fish eagles, and many others can be found. In 1996 it was reported that bird numbers had reportedly fallen by 10% of what they were in the 1970s due to the over-harvesting of eggs, chicks, and fledglings. Considered delicacies, many of these eggs are eaten at Khmer New Year or sold to other countries. The international wildlife trade also offers large rewards for endangered water birds, turtles, and pythons.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What bird populations are to be found in your community? (find out as much information as you can about the bird population such as where they live, where they breed, whether they migrate.)**
- 2. What eggs are considered delicacies by your community?**

¹⁸ Wetlands: Marshy, lowland areas that are regularly flooded during the rainy season

6g. The Naga

Shortly after the Buddha had achieved enlightenment, he meditated under the shade of a large tree by the Muchalinda water pond. Mara sent a violent storm in order to distract the Buddha from his meditation. The King of the Nagas, Muchalinda, came to the Buddha and rolled his body into coils for the Buddha to sit on, his head forming a hood to protect the Buddha from the strong rains.

The Naga (*Niek*), or snakelike water god, has a special place in Buddhism and is expressed in many Buddhist art forms. The Naga is recognised as a worshipper and protector of the Buddha. It is a popular Buddhist image in Cambodia, and Nagas can be seen decorating the handrails and roofs of many wats throughout the country. The image of the Buddha being sheltered by the Naga is one that is common in Khmer sculpture. Nagas also appear in the folk history of Cambodia. They live in a kingdom under the earth or water, but can come to the surface, breathe air, and even change into human form. The Naga is a good environmental symbol for demonstrating the inter-related character of life on the earth and the need to protect nature, people, and cultures.

The Buddhist principles of *kamma* (actions based on cause and effect) and *samsara* (cycles of death and rebirth) prepare Buddhists to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards animals. According to this belief it is possible for human beings to be reborn as animals. Therefore it is only right that we treat animals with kindness and sympathy.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What other mythical animals could serve in your community as suitable environmental symbols?**
- 2. Discuss what these mythical animals represent and how they can be used to generate awareness of environmental issues.**

ACTIVITIES

1. Understanding animals and wildlife in your community

Objective: to consider how human activities are destroying wildlife habitats and endangering certain species.

Activities:

This activity involves the development of a time chart as follows:

PAST (1969)	PRESENT (1999)	FUTURE (2039)

- Split into three groups. Each group is given one of the above periods.
- In your group discuss what wildlife was/is/will be present in and around your community.
- Present your ideas either as a list of wildlife species or as an illustration
- All three groups should meet to present, explain and compare their results

2. Hunting, shooting, fishing

Objective: to consider which methods of wildlife harvesting are sustainable and to compare it with the most commonly used methods in your community.

Activities:

Below is a list of different methods used for killing wildlife. (Please feel free to add other methods.)

- trap
- fishing net
- poison
- gun
- bow and arrow

- **burning forests**
- **explosives**

- Write the list on a black board or pieces of paper;
- Split into two groups;
- Ask one group to arrange the methods in order of the most destructive to the least destructive;
- Ask one group to arrange the methods in order of the most commonly used methods in the community to the least commonly used;
- Ask each group to present their findings and give reasons why;
- Compare the results of the two groups and see to what extent there is a correlation.

SECTION SEVEN

AVOIDING POLLUTION AND WASTE

7a. Pollution of Water Sources

Many centuries before the contamination of the earth's water, the Buddha set down rules forbidding the pollution of water resources. Several *Vinaya Pitaka* rules prohibit monks from polluting grounds and water with spit, faeces, and urine. These human wastes were the common agents of pollution during the Buddha's day. To pollute water is similar to committing a sin because all lives depend on water. A water strainer has always been one of the eight basic tools provided to when they ordain. Today, monks still receive water filters as a reminder to drink clean water and guard against harming small insects and living creatures in the water.

As the population in Cambodian cities and towns grows, sanitation is becoming an increasing problem. Water becomes contaminated from sewage and chemicals which are disposed into the rivers. Another problem is people throwing garbage or pouring toxic wastes (chemicals, oils, pesticides) into ponds, streams, and canals. Polluted water is a health hazard and many diseases can be contracted through drinking or bathing in unclean water.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What are the causes of pollution in your community water sources?**
- 2. Discuss practical ways in which community water sources can be kept free of pollution. (Examples: building fences around wells and ponds, keeping sources of drinking water away from latrines and chemically treated areas, and providing a landfill site where waste can be safely disposed.)**

7b. Keeping Your Environment Clean

After the Buddha's death, a great Buddhist monk who lived in a pagoda near a great river tried his best to sweep the pagoda clean every day. One day he piled up some rubbish to be thrown away. As a dog was defecating on the rubbish pile, the elder monk asked a younger monk to collect the rubbish and excrement for disposal. Although the young monk was not happy about the chore, he did as he was asked. Both monks were reborn in heaven. According to the *Vinaya Pittaka*, monks are required to keep the environment in which they live clean – inside the kuti and also the temple grounds. The timetable prepared by the early Maha Theras required monks to clean the wat in the early morning and evening. A monk who does not perform these duties is not following his precepts - *Sila*.

In Cambodia's cities and towns, rubbish is often thrown into the streets. This not only looks unsightly and blocks drains, but also provides a breeding ground for mosquitoes and rats. Rubbish also creates a fire hazard. A healthy and pleasant environment is a clean environment. To sweep up dirty places helps to improve and calm the mind. Removing rubbish also helps prevent the spread of disease and fire. People in urban areas need to take more responsibility for their environment and contribute towards keeping it clean. Household waste should be disposed of carefully and children should be prevented from playing on rubbish dumps where they can contract infections and disease.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Is your wat clean? If yes, how is it kept clean? If not, why does it remain dirty?**
- 2. Is the area outside of your wat as clean or dirty as the area inside the wat? How can you help to keep the environment inside and outside of the wat equally clean?**
- 3. How can you help to inform others about the consequences and dangers caused by irresponsible disposal of rubbish?**

7c. The Importance of Hygiene

In the Buddha's time, lavatories were often built with walls of brick or wood. Holes were dug for draining waste water and a separate place was provided for holding clean water for washing. In *Cullavagga*, there is a detailed description of how a lavatory should be built - by spreading bricks, stones, or wood and laying down drainage so that the floor remains dry. The lavatory is surrounded by a fence and front porch with a door to it. A vessel to hold water for rinsing is also provided.

The Buddhist community has long been concerned about preserving a clean and healthy environment. Monks were taught to build their own latrines to maintain personal and environmental cleanliness. A story tells of a famous old Buddhist monk who badly needed to urinate in a populated place. Having noticed this, a rich man quickly built a lavatory with walls of cloth. The man was later reborn as a son of gods in heaven because of his good deed. Personal as well as mental hygiene (meditation as purification of the mind) are the most important steps in developing and maintaining a clean and healthy environment. When we have learned to take care of ourselves, it becomes easier to care for the environment around us.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Discuss how the sanitation facilities and practices in your wat and surrounding community can be improved.**
- 2. Discuss practical ways in which the wat community teach people about basic hygiene, such as using a latrine and washing your hands before eating and after visiting the toilet.**

7d. Noise Pollution

The Buddha once emphatically advised (*Majjhima Nikaya I*):

O Monks, whenever you gather together you should either talk on meaningful matters or observe noble silence.

According to the Master, keeping silent is a noble practice. The Buddha was critical of noise and once ordered a group of monks to leave the monastery for noisy behaviour. In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, noise is described as a thorn to one engaged in the first step of meditation. Silent and solitary habits promotes self-awareness.

Noise pollution in Cambodia's cities, towns, and many villages is increasing with the growth of vehicle traffic on the roads, the use of generators, loudspeakers, and Karaoke machines. Noise is a serious personal and environmental pollutant which can cause stress, irritation, deafness, resentment. Noise saps energy and lowers efficiency. It can disturb other members of a community as it interferes with work, study, sleep, and relaxation which can lead to disputes and conflict.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Spend five minutes sitting in silence as a group. What sounds can you hear? Which sounds are pleasant? Which sounds are unpleasant? Discuss.***
- 2. In a silent setting, practice group meditation (samadhi) for ten minutes. Focus your mind on your breathing (inhaling, exhaling) and note the movements of the body. Avoid taking note of outside noises. Discuss the inner feelings you experienced.***

7e. Recycling

Just after The Buddha's demise (*parinibbana*), Venerable Ananda, The Buddha's personal attendant, held a discussion with King Udena. At that time five hundred courtesans of King Udena visited Ven. Ananda to hear the Dhamma. Delighted with his teachings, they made an offering of 500 robes to the monk. Surprised by this event, the King approached the monk and asked:

"What will you do with such a big heap of new robes? Are you going to open a shop?"

Ven. Ananda replied: *"We share them with the other monks."*

"What will they do with their old robes?," asked the King.

Responding, the monk explained the process of re-using the old robes. When new robes are received the old robes are used as coverlets, old coverlets as mattress covers, the old mattress covers as rugs, the old rugs as dusters, the dusters as foot-wipers, and the old tattered foot wipers are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls (*Vinaya Pitaka II*). Thus nothing usable is wasted. Those who waste are described as "wood-apple eaters." A man shakes the branch of the wood-apple tree and all the fruits, ripe as well as unripe, fall. The man would collect only what he wants and leave the rest to rot. (*Anguttara Nikaya IV*)

Questions for Discussion

- 1. What items does your wat and your household recycle on a regular basis? Are there items that you throw away that could be used again?**
- 2. Discuss ways in which recycling could be made a regular part of your wat's and your household's daily life.**

ACTIVITIES

Objectives: to analyse the ways in which we cause pollution in our everyday life, and to think of simple ways in which we can cut down the pollution of our environment.

Activities:

An Experiment

Fill two containers with water and cover one.
Leave for a week and then go back to look at each container.
Which water would you rather drink?

Clean up!

Find an area in your community that is polluted - it could be a water source, or a rubbish dump. Think of ways to organize a community activity (Shramadana¹⁹) to clean up this particular area and to keep it clean in the future. Put the ideas into practise.

Recycle!

Make a record of what you throw out in one week
How much of it could be used again and in what ways?
Put your ideas into practise.

And Finally....

- Design and draw large posters of the perfect environment, using what you've learnt from the stories in the book, and the ideas you've thought of.
- Display your poster in a public place, such as the Wat or the local school, so that other people can learn from your ideas.
- See if you can find other Buddhist stories that relate to the environment. Add them to this book and draw a picture to illustrate them.

¹⁹ A Shramadana is a self-organized community action to improve the quality of life in and for the community

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