



HIS HOLINESS THE 17TH KARMAPA'S VISION AND WORK ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Recognizing the importance of environmental protection as championed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Karmapa has been giving instructions on the subject on various occasions. However, it was in 2007 that His Holiness began strongly advocating for environmental protection within the Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist community, which he is the head of.

2007

At the 2007 Kagyu Monlam in Bodh Gaya, His Holiness made environmental protection a priority and said that he would like to see practical results within the Kagyu community. He made a special request to his monasteries that they plant 1,000 trees if they could. He also encouraged the congregation of his followers around the world to take individual responsibility for protecting the environment in their own respective countries. In the following year, all monasteries under him planted trees, and some monasteries planted several thousand saplings.

2008

In 2008, His Holiness produced the Environmental Guidelines for Kagyu Monasteries, Centers and Community. On doing so, he said "this booklet is but a small drop in a huge ocean. The challenge of environmental degradation is far more complex and extensive than anything we alone can tackle. However, if we can all contribute a single drop of clean water, those drops will accumulate into a fresh pond, then a clear stream and eventually a vast pure ocean. This is my aspiration."

The Guidelines lay out environmental issues most important in the Himalayas and in Tibet; Forests, Water, Wildlife, Waste and Climate Change and offers solutions based on the most recent scientific and practical knowledge available. The booklet was initially produced in English and Chinese and distributed widely. The Tibetan translation was led by His Holiness himself and is available now. It was very popular and the supply couldn't meet the demand so His Holiness made the Guidelines available online in all three languages.

2009

In March of 2009, His Holiness hosted the First Environmental Conference for Kagyu Monasteries, Centers and Community in Sarnath. It was attended by 60 representatives from 22 monasteries and nunneries, and had honored guests such as HE Thrangu Rinpoche and HE Drupon Rinpoche.

The purpose of the conference was to train the representatives on environmental issues and to make them understand why environmental protection is so important in the Himalayas and in Tibet. The five day conference resulted in monastery representatives gaining a science-based understanding of these issues, being part of working groups to develop site-based solutions for their environmental problems, and making commitments to work on environmental issues that most affect their own community. Two days were set aside for problem solving and strategy development and ended up generating the 108 Things You Can Do To Save the Environment.

WWF provided technical expertise for this and Dekila Chungyalpa, Director from WWF US, facilitated the conference.

Another important outcome of the workshop was the nominations of environmental coordinators from attending monasteries and nunneries. These coordinators are now in charge of managing environmental activities in their locations. In some of the larger monasteries like Rumtek in Sikkim, environmental planning is taking place with NGOs such as WWF to begin work on restoring their water source area, forestation and alternative energy programs. Similarly, other monasteries have set up waste management or water protection activities.

The Second Conference on Environmental Protection for Kagyu Monasteries and Centers was held in Gyuto in October 2009. 34 monasteries sent their representatives, many of whom had attended the 1st conference. Those monasteries that had created environmental goals made progress reports. Similar to the first conference, three days were put aside for providing science based training on environmental issues but this time with a practical hands-on approach. Working jointly with local Dharamsala NGOs, the attendees were able to see demonstration sites on water restoration, environmentally designed nunneries, waste management and composting and so on. The attendees also participated in a river clean up. This conference benefitted greatly from the expertise of Nepal Buddhist Federation, World Wildlife Fund India, Wildlife Trust of India and TESI Environmental Movement.

One of the main results of this workshop was an agreement among the attending monasteries to create an association of monasteries that are carrying out environmental projects. Initially conceptualized as a Kagyu NGO, His Holiness was requested by Gyuto Monastery and NBF representatives to consider keeping the association open for all Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.

"Whatever I do, I want it to have a long term visible effect and for it to be practical. If I have the opportunity, I want to create long term change and improvement of the environment in Tibet and Himalayas, especially to benefit the forests, the water and wildlife of this region."

His Holiness's Vision

His Holiness has laid out various goals for himself and has a vision that consists of building environmental management capacity for all Kagyu monasteries and centers. In keeping with this, his own activities have included:

- Establishing an annual conference for Kagyu monasteries and centers
- Inviting experts who can provide training and teach monks and nuns on specific environmental activities - solar installations, rainwater harvesting
- Asking all monasteries to follow a work plan and reporting procedure
- Improving environmental materials for monastic audiences through the development of the Environmental Guidelines (now being translated into Nepali and Hindi as well)
- Making posters of 108 Solutions in different languages
- Setting up environmental website where everyone can follow progress of monasteries as well as His Holiness's environmental activities

Ultimately, he would like his monasteries to become leaders in their community on environmental issues:

- Monasteries set up medical facilities, especially in disaster areas
- Monasteries should pick most important issues and work with local community leaders
- Monasteries establish partnerships with government or NGO groups
- Monasteries initiate clean-up activities not just in monastery premises but out side too.

His Holiness continues to study Environmental Science and meet with scientists and leading environmental thinkers. His Holiness has made time to meet with environmental NGOs and leaders whenever possible and invites them to work with Kagyu monasteries and centers. He is very interested to visit Protected Areas and Wildlife Reserves and has expressed several times the desire to see wildlife in their natural environments.

He hopes that leaders like himself can be part of a global solution regarding Climate Change, which he says can be achieved only with all of us making the pure motivation to benefit ALL life on Earth and not only our own selves. He put it in simple terms recently, **"Protect the earth. Live simply. Act with compassion. Our future depends on it."**

