The White Conch (dungkar) resonates with the sound of Buddhist teachings to symbolize the awakening of sentient beings from ignorance.

(Above) Monks recite their early morning prayers from large books printed on handmade paper. Photo by John Berthold

(Right) Some nuns are learning how to document and conserve works of art. Although not a "traditional" skill taught in monastic communities, documentation is respected as a means of protecting the artistic history of Bhutan. Photo by Ann Shaftel, courtesy Friends of Bhutan's Culture

Bhutan is one of the few places on Earth where traditional Mahayana Buddhism is practiced widely. Thousands of monks live in hundreds of monastic communities throughout Bhutan. Although monastic life is essentially male, nuns also live in small religious communities. Most Bhutanese families include at least one monk.

Monastic communities continue to offer a highly disciplined religious education. After years of academic training, many monks also take up artistic traditions, and in recent years some monks and nuns have learned how to preserve and restore textiles and thangkas using modern techniques.

In addition to keeping Buddhist traditions and teachings alive, Bhutan’s religious communities serve surrounding communities by performing acts of charity and ceremonies in public places and family homes.

Buddhist Monks and Nuns

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