

Resources

Faith Organisations

Christian Eco-congregations www.ecocongregation.org
UK-based ecumenical organization encouraging churches to consider environmental issues within a Christian context

Christian Ecology Link (CEL) www.christian-ecology.org.uk
CEL is a multi-denominational UK Christian organization for people concerned about the Environment

London Islamic Network for the Environment (LINE) www.lineonweb.org.uk
LINE is the UK's first local Islamic environmental group. Open to people of all faiths and beliefs

Connecting Judaism to the Environment www.biggreenjewish.org

Sikh Environment Network <http://sikh-environment-network.blogspot.com>
SARBAT-DA-BHALLA! - Caring for all existence! PEACE: People.. Earth.. Animals.. Collective.. Existence

Interfaith Dorset Education and Action includes different faith perspectives on the environment www.eco-faith.org

Organisations

Greater Reading Environmental Network (GREN)
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ReadingEnvNetwork/> A network of groups and individuals sharing information and experiences in working to promote environmental sustainability and lobby for positive action

Stop Climate Chaos www.stopclimatechaos.org The UK's largest group of people dedicated to action on climate change and limiting its impact on the world's poorest people spans over 70 organisations, from environment and development charities to unions, faith, community and women's groups.

Every Action Counts www.everyactioncounts.org.uk a programme of action to support Voluntary, Community and Faith groups to become more sustainable in what they do and how they manage their buildings. Local Contact: Paul Harper
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FAITH FORUM

READING

Greening Faiths Towards sustainable living

All the great faiths traditionally had reverence and respect for nature.

As nations industrialised, “nature” became seen as less important. With our modern technology, living in vast cities, surely nature is irrelevant. Perhaps, people thought, we need neither nature nor faith now.

All around us now we are finding we are still dependent on nature. We have to learn to live with nature, or die as nature dies for lack of respect.

This leaflet is produced by Reading Faith Forum

It outlines briefly ideas of six major faiths about the environment.

New Kadampa Tradition - International Kadampa Buddhist Union
an international Buddhist charity dedicated to building Temples for World
peace in every major city of the World.



Throughout history human beings have sought to improve their external situation, yet despite all our efforts we are no happier. It is true that from the point of view of material development many countries are making progress. Technology is becoming more and more sophisticated, and worldly knowledge has increased dramatically. We know so many things we did not know before and can do things we never even dreamt of. Superficially it looks as if our world is improving, but if we look a little more deeply we shall see that there are now many problems that never existed before. Terrifying weapons have been invented, our environment is being poisoned, and new diseases are appearing. Even simple pleasures like eating or lying in the sun are becoming more dangerous.

The result of an unbridled pursuit of happiness from external sources is that our planet is being destroyed and our lives are becoming more complicated and dissatisfying. It is time we sought happiness from a different source. Happiness is a state of mind, so the real source of happiness must lie within the mind, not in external conditions.

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso *Eight Steps to Happiness* Tharpa Publications, 2000 www.nkt.com

Zen Buddhism

We simply see the Earth as the beautiful body of a living being, and we know that any harm done to one part of that organism can harm the whole organism. It's like a flower or a human being. Anything done to one cell will affect the whole being. If you know that the earth is a living organism, you will know how to protect her, because to protect the Earth and the air around the Earth is to protect ourselves. Everything is linked to everything else. To save our planet is to save ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. This idea is deep within the teaching of the Buddha.

Thich Nhat Hanh *Cultivating the Mind of Love* Parallax Press, 1996

Sikhism and the Environment

The Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) is a compilation of spiritual hymns with a common philosophy but written by different spiritual masters. The scripture contains compositions of the Sikh Gurus, Bhagats (saints) and Bhattas (poets of the Sikh Gurus). It is a treasure of divine knowledge and mysticism and is a guide for a spiritual and sustainable life. According to the hymns, 'spirituality' means love for God and His Kar (creation).

Sikh Eco-Theology

The care for the environment, the sense of ecology, the protection of bio-diversity and sustainable living have all been part of the basic tenets of the Sikh faith. The Sikh Gurus explained that the whole universe is the creation of one God. The Guru Granth Sahib states that the aim of human existence is to reach a blissful life. We have to live in harmony with the earth and all of God's Kar. The Sikh environmental ethos affirms that every part of nature belong together and are in a physical as well as metaphysical relationship. The influence of Sikh ideals has also endowed a spirit of egalitarianism, enterprise and hard work in the agrarian structure of Panjab.

Guru Nanak Sahib ji in the Japji Sahib

Tis vich dhartee thaap rakhee dharamsaal.
'Within the universe, the planet Earth was established as
a shrine and a school for souls'.
(on page 7 of the Guru Granth Sahib)

Pavan guru paanee pitaa maataa dharat mahat.
'Air is the Guru, water is the father, and the
earth is the great mother of all'.
(on page 8 of the Guru Granth Sahib)

Judaism and the Environment

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Thousands of years before the word “environmentalism” was coined, Jewish tradition paid attention to taking care of the earth, treating animals with compassion and teaching Jews not to waste anything. Nature imagery fills our prayers and enhances many of our holiday celebrations.

The pillars of Jewish environmental awareness are rooted in Judaism’s underlying beliefs about how the world was created and expressed as Jewish law in the Torah and Talmud.

1. The Belief in the Oneness of God

The most basic belief of Judaism is the belief in one God. So, too, Judaism tells us that this Oneness is evident in the inter-connectedness of the natural world, what science today describes as “ecology.”

2. God is the “Owner” of the World

Judaism views God as the rightful owner of the world with us, all humans, as its caretakers. We have a right to use any of its resources but this right is tempered by our responsibility to protect these resources for use by all future generations.

3. God Created the World with Intent and Purpose

Jewish tradition tells us that God created the universe with purpose. Nothing was created by “accident” or without a reason.

4. *Baal Tashchit* -- Prohibitions against Waste

This commandment is the basis of the prohibition against wasting or destroying anything needlessly. This is derived from Deuteronomy (20:19-20) which commands us not to cut down fruit trees when besieging a city, but applies more generally.

5. *Tzaar Ba’alei Hayyim* -- Prohibition against Causing Animals Unnecessary Pain

This prohibition tells us not to cause animals any unnecessary physical or emotional pain. So important is this prohibition that it appears in several places throughout the Torah.

6. Shabbat and Sabbatical Years -- Land Rest and Renewal

Land rest and renewal are concepts that appear in the Torah in conjunction with instructions on how to care for the Land of Israel. The earth is to rest once a week on Shabbat and every seventh year, called the Sabbatical year.

7. Earth Stewardship is a Personal Commitment

Observing the mitzvot (commandments) of earth stewardship is a personal commitment. It is not a commitment that depends on a grass-roots party or a supportive political system. It is the responsibility of the individual to perform regardless of what others are doing. Ultimately, Jewish tradition believes that the individual who performs the mitzvot with joy will have a positive effect on those who do not. Ultimately this is the lesson we learn from Abraham’s role in bringing monotheism to the world.

Christianity and the Environment

The Christian response to the environment is rooted in Hebrew scripture. Rejecting the violent creation narratives of the neighbouring Babylonians, the Israelites recognised that the earth and all life on it is ‘good’ and was formed by a loving God. This was not to serve God or because God needed it, but because it is God’s nature to express love through creating. Christians believe that ‘God’s eternal power and divine nature . . . have been understood and seen through the things God has made’ (Romans 1:20).

God granted stewardship over the earth to humans made in God’s image. But God also brings rain and life to lands where no people live (Job 38:26) and cares to feed the birds (Matthew 6:26) All creation praises God by being what it was created to be (Psalm 148) and God continues to create. The ultimate expression of the goodness, even sacredness, of created matter is God’s own incarnation: Jesus Christ (John 1). Jesus began his ministry living in the wilderness with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13). This foreshadowed the harmony which has been promised for the whole world: ‘the wolf shall live with the lamb . . . the nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp’ (Isaiah 11; Romans 8:18-22).



It has been argued that Judaeo-Christian ideology is responsible for the degradation of the earth because in Genesis 1:28 God gives people ‘dominion . . . over every living thing’ [L. White, *Science*, 1967]. While this remains a controversial thesis, modern scholars point out that the Hebrew words indicate a rule which requires loving respect for subjects. Moreover, many theologians argue the need for Christians to understand this passage through Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God in which the greatest are the servants of all. Jesus prioritised the poorest and the marginalised in this world. Christian development agencies and the environmental campaigns of many denominations point out that the poorest are already suffering most from the current environmental crisis: we must act to protect them from the consequences of further climate change and environmentally damaging agricultural practices. Jesus also emphasised God’s command to love our neighbours as ourselves. Some theologians suggest that now we understand our dependence upon the rainforests and our impact upon dwindling populations of God’s beautiful creatures, we need to extend our understanding of who are neighbours are. In God’s kingdom all the new creation is in harmony. If we long for the kingdom we long for this.

The Sanatana Dharma and The Environment

The Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) asserts that the material and the spiritual are one. It does not believe in a unity between Creator and created ~ for such unity would imply the existence of a duality. It does not say that there is one God but rather that God is One. In the words of the *Nasadiya Suktam*, The Hymn of Creation from the most ancient **Rig Veda**,

*“When love arose in it,
The One became the many...”*

Once this is said, **everything** falls into the realm of the sacred, of the Creator. This is ecology in the most holistic sense of the word because it applies to all relations among all things. I cannot do harm to another for there is in reality no ‘other’. In this view the *atman* (Eternal Self) is not an isolated entity and *sat* (truth) can never be separated from *shivam* (goodness) and *sundaram* (beauty).

Thus, there is no religious ritual or act more sacred than caring for creation. The careless destruction of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the plants we eat, is the ultimate betrayal of that essential truth of One. As we lay waste to our environment, we lay waste to ourselves and betray that truth. Then we stumble through this world in darkness unable to contact our own goodness or that of creation and all beauty is lost to us. Our redemption lies in our capacity to turn our attention from the fragmented to the whole, from the particular to the universal, and allow our actions to be guided by that vision. Then we will live as human beings are meant to live: in a way that does justice to both creation and Creator.

Submitted by Swami Ambikananda on behalf of Reading Hindu Temple
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Islam & the Environment

Islam teaches Muslims to respect Allah’s creation and maintain the balance He created. Allah commands people,
“Eat and drink from the provision of God, and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption.” [Quran 2:60]

Muslims are instructed to be responsible and considerate citizens in our families and communities, practising concern and moderation in our lives. We can do this best by following the guidance of The Qur’an and Sunnah, which clearly invites us to live in harmony, not only with our neighbours, but also with our environment. In our moments of reflection, as we gaze around at our Lord’s signs and admire his Majesty in the beauty of the trees that provides us with Delicious fruits, the clouds from which fall the nourishing rain and the vast oceans which man harvests and upon which he is carried great distances; we must surely recognise that the earth and everything in it is a trust placed upon us. We are temporary custodians and this is another of Allah’s tests for us to see how we care for our environment and all things within it.

Climate change is the consequence of man disturbing the balance of Allah’s creation in his plundering of the Earth for greed and misguided progress. Over industrialization and energy generation has brought environmental disaster in its wake. It is playing havoc in the form of drought, disease and freak weather in muslim countries as well.

References to Earth in the Quran is stated no less than 485 times. The following are some excerpts on Man & the environment;

“Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by (reason of) what the hands of people have earned, so He (i.e. God) may let them taste part of (the consequences of) what they have done that perhaps they will return (to righteousness).” [Quran 30:41]
Those who squander are the brothers of Satan, and Satan is most ungrateful to his Lord (Qur’an 17:27)

As for the Earth, We have spread it out, set firm mountains on it, and make everything grow there in due balance. Quran 14:19`

“To God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth, for God encompasses everything [4:126].” The Therefore abusing one of his creations, whether it is a living being or a natural resource, is a sin. The Prophet considered all of God’s creations to be equal before God and he believed animals, but also land, forests and watercourses should have rights.

The Qur’an explains that mankind holds a privileged position among God’s creations on earth: he is chosen as *khalifa*, “vice-regent” and carries the responsibility of caring for God’s earthly creations. Each individual is given this task and privilege in the form of God’s trust. But the Qur’an repeatedly warns believers against arrogance: they are no better than other creatures. *“No creature is there on earth nor a bird flying with its wings but they are nations like you [6:38]”; “Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of man; but most people know not [40:57]”.*