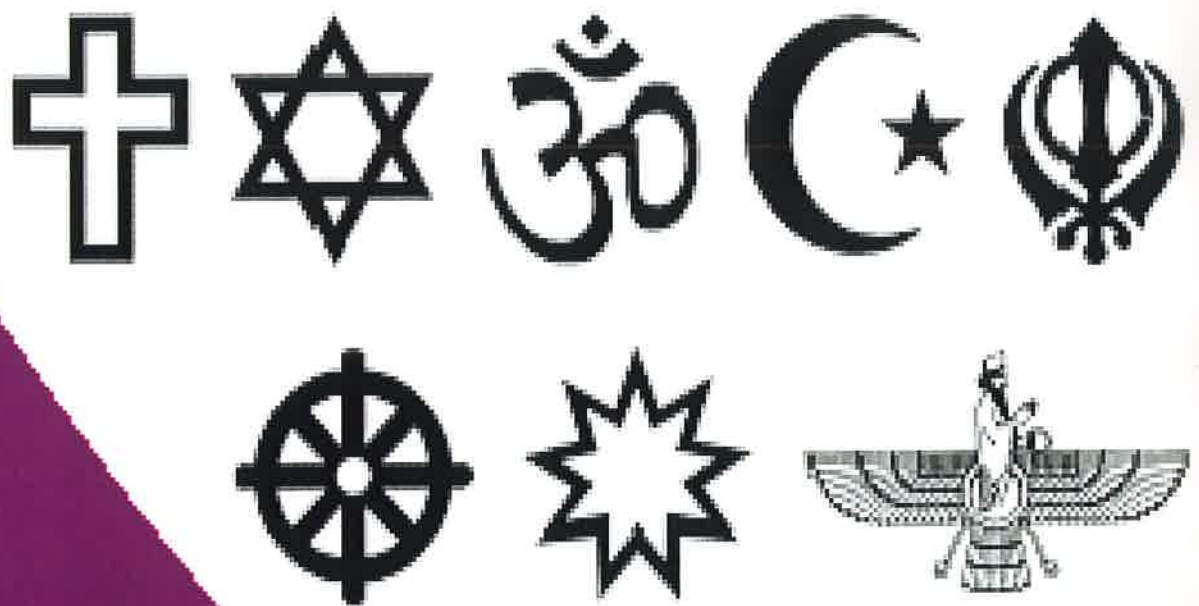


Faith Perspectives on Climate Change





Introduction

Faith Perspectives on Climate Change has been developed to encourage people of all faiths to understand their responsibility to the Earth and to the environment.

This booklet came together six-months after the Redbridge Faith Forum held a meeting highlighting the significance faith plays in encouraging people to reduce their ecological footprint.

Extracts from holy texts were read by members of the Forum at the gathering titled God and Global Warming that took place in November 2005. Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Baha'i perspectives, some of which are in this booklet, were presented at this meeting.

The authors – some of who are on the Redbridge Faith Forum's management committee – others who are members of the Forum, and a few leading writers in their fields have kindly researched individual perspectives that are featured in this booklet.

Every day we are made aware of increasing greenhouse gases causing the hole in the ozone layer to grow, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, drought, floods and temperature increases around the world. We see pictures in newspapers and televised reports of environmental problems causing thousands of deaths and leaving people homeless.

Every person, group, family, community and place of worship has a social, moral and ecological responsibility to the Earth and how its treated and maintained.

This booklet is a gentle reminder that it's not too late to do something to change people's behaviour towards reducing pollution and waste, which will help towards a better future for generations to come.

Thank you to the contributors and to Redbridge Council for the continued support.

Redbridge Faith Forum

What is Climate Change?

The climate of the Earth is always changing and in the past it has altered as a result of natural causes.

Nowadays, however, the term climate change is generally used when referring to changes in our climate that have been identified since the early part of the 1900s.

The changes we've seen over recent years, and those that are predicted, are thought to be mainly as a result of human behaviour rather than due to natural changes in the atmosphere.

Causes of Climate Change

The greenhouse effect is very important when we talk about climate change, as it relates to the gases that keep the Earth warm.

It is the extra greenhouse gases, which humans have released – mainly through burning fossil fuels – that are thought to pose the strongest threat. Such gases include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, and although they appear naturally, they are also made through the industrial process.

These greenhouse gases keep the Earth warm enough to support life, but scientists believe that increased emissions of greenhouse gases are causing too much energy to be trapped, increasing the global temperature.

Everyday we see images of just some of the affects of climate change, which include:

- Extreme weather conditions like heat waves
- Flooding from torrential rains
- Rising sea levels because the arctic sea is thinning and there is heavier rain fall
- Droughts and water shortages
- Increase in the number of endangered species

The impact of Climate Change on Redbridge

Thousands of residents, homes, buildings, public transport, and businesses will be directly affected by the affects of changes on the planet.

Redbridge has already seen extensive flooding through heavy rainfall in 2001 and parts of the borough were under water in 2003 after heavy rain falls and the River Roding burst its banks.

Thousands of people are also expected to move into the borough over the next few years, which will put a strain on water supplies and the sewage system especially if our summers are getting hotter and storm surges are expected to increase in frequency.

Illnesses will increase, which will add to the strain on health resources. Warmer weather has already seen the number of people suffering from asthma increase.

By John Turkson, Principal Partnership Officer, from Redbridge Council's Strategic Services.

The Jewish View

The importance of caring for the environment is a fundamental principle of Judaism, derived from the earliest section of the Hebrew Bible:

'God took Adam and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to protect it.' (Genesis 2:15)

The Rabbis of old, in developing their interpretation of the Biblical text, extended this statement:

'God showed Adam and Eve all round the Garden, showing them its beauty and then said "See how lovely and how worthy of praise are My works. They have all been created for your sake. Take care not to spoil or destroy My world".' (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13)

Similarly with regard protecting the ecosystem the Bible commands:

'When besieging a city, making war against it, don't destroy its fruit-bearing trees.' (Deuteronomy 20:19)

The nineteenth century German Rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, stated that the prohibition applies to the protection of the whole eco-system. Moses Maimonides, the twelfth century Spanish Rabbi – perhaps the greatest medieval Jewish scholar – extended the concept:

'It is not only forbidden to destroy fruit-bearing trees but whoever breaks vessels, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a fountain, or wastes food in a destructive way offends against the law of you shall not destroy'.

The Bible also recognised the need to protect the Green Belt:

'The fields around the lands allocated to the Levites may not be sold.' (Leviticus 25:34)

The Talmud, the most important Jewish Law Book, extends this –

'Just as a field cannot be sold, so it may not be altered.' (Arachin 33b)

Even air pollution control was recognised by early Jewish scholars:

'A fixed threshing floor must be kept 50 cubits (about 25 yards) from a town.' (Mishnah Baba Batra)

This is so that wind shouldn't carry the chaff and dust particles, jeopardising the health of the city dwellers.

The Bible commands regarding safety:

'When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof.' (Deuteronomy 22:8)

The Talmud addresses the disposal of hazardous substances:

'Morality is measured by how one disposes of broken glass and other dangerous objects; the ideal is to bury them so deep they cannot possibly harm anyone.' (Baba Kama)

A major aspect of care for the environment is our obligation to future generations. The Talmud relates a story:

'One day Choni, a wise and holy man, was journeying on the road and saw an old man planting a carob tree. "How long will it take for this carob tree to produce fruit?" asked Choni. "About 70 years," answered the old man. "Do you think you'll still be alive to eat from it?" exclaimed Choni in surprise. "No," replied the old man, but just as I found trees planted by my ancestors, so too I am planting for my descendants".' We are obligated to ensure that we pass on to future generations the benefits of God's works, the world that we have been commanded to cultivate and protect.' (Ta'anit 23a)

These are just a few examples and there are many other quotations from the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud and other holy texts that could have been included in this presentation to demonstrate the importance of this topic as a Jewish value. However, far more pressing is ensuring that ways are found whereby we can all play our part in acting on the good intentions.

By Rabbi Maurice Michaels, from the South West Essex & Settlement Reform Synagogue, Newbury Park, Ilford and he is a member of the Redbridge Faith Forum's Management Committee.

The Baha'i View

The Baha'i approach is of oneness and wholeness that promotes admiration and respect for the Earth and its creatures.

The faith recognises that there are different religions and people from different cultures living in the world, but it's the holistic approach of the faith recognises that everybody is one, therefore everyone has a duty to look after the Earth:

"...even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent identity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together." Baha'i writings

Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i faith, warned about the human misuse of the planet's resources hundreds of years ago:

"Strange and astonishing things exist in the Earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understanding of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the Earth and their contamination would prove lethal."

Humans are encouraged to use what the Earth has to offer in a positive way to achieve positive ends, and achieve balance and harmony.

Change is part of the natural world that we live in, but Baha'is are also given insight into how greed and disruption to nature and the environment will have many detrimental affects:

"If carried to excess, civilisation will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities."

Each person has a responsibility to ensure they work towards preserving God's Earth from any harm caused by pollution, global warming and social inequalities:

"This span of Earth is but one homeland and one habitation."
Baha'u'llah

"Every man of discernment, when walking upon the Earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very Earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men."

Baha'i teachings and scriptures focus on how mankind has the power to learn about nature and its benefits. Parents also have a responsibility to teach their children to show consideration to animals.

"Train your children from their earliest days to be indefinitely tender and loving to animals."

Humans cannot be thought of as separate entities from their surroundings:

"We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is as a result of these mutual reactions."
Baha'i writings

Carol Khosandyon, a teacher, is the Redbridge Faith Forum's secretary and represents the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Redbridge.

The Christian View

We believe that the Earth is a gift from God. However, only in the 1960s did we observe, through the eyes of the astronauts in space, the wondrous beauty and delicacy of our planet. It was with fresh understanding that we could join the psalmist's words:

"Let Earth praise Yahweh."

Mother Earth

Science teaches us that the web of life on Earth, which unites all that exists, has emerged over billions of years. Earth is indeed the "womb" from which all has evolved, set within the vast expanse of the cosmos.

Creatures

In the Genesis story of creation, humankind emerges at the climax of the process. Partly as a consequence, there has been a tendency to exalt humanity and to see the rest of the creation as existing to serve human needs.

This is not so; all that exists is so interconnected that to destroy, harm one part is to damage the whole. Moreover, Scripture reflects the fundamental flaws in humanity, which have led to today's unprecedented threat to life's very survival.

Preservation

Jesus in his teaching, called on his followers to:

"Read the signs of the times." (Luke 11: 54-56)

To do so now is to observe the effects of human actions - most evident in the threat posed by global warming; the pollution of the atmosphere, of our land and water systems. This we know and must needs accept moral responsibility.

Respect

If we believe that every creature, the entire Earth and the expanding cosmos reveal God's grandeur then we are clearly called to show respect for all, without exception. All are interconnected; all express in some way the wisdom most fully manifested in the person of Jesus.

**"The heart of the Christian message is that God takes our material world completely seriously".
(Archbishop Rowan Williams)**

Prayer

**Lord, you have given us this beautiful world.
You have given us the ability to develop crops and animals to satisfy our hunger.
Yet we have gone further. We are poisoning your world and destroying many of your creatures.
Teach us, Lord, to come to our senses, and to know that we interfere with your world at our peril.
Give us the grace to let your hand, not ours, rule your world.
Help us to understand that in the end you will have the final say, because the universe is yours and all that is in it.**

By Sister Elizabeth Rendall on behalf of the Christian Ecology Link and Eco-congregation.

The Islamic View

Why is Global Warming Important?

- At the rate our climate is changing, the world will soon be warmer than at any time in the last 10,000 years.
- About 30 new infectious diseases have emerged in the past 20 years.
- Global warming will expose millions of people to new health risks. Infectious diseases are emerging, resurging and undergoing redistribution on a global scale.
- By the year 2050, up to one million additional deaths from malaria may be occurring annually as a result of climate change.

The Importance of Treating this World with Respect

The Prophet Muhammad told his followers they would be rewarded by God for taking care of the Earth.

He said: "If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eats of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much in charity."

There is not an animal (that lives) on the Earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end. (Qur'an -6:38)

The facts are very different to what the teachings say:

- Rainforests once covered 14% of the Earth's land surface; now they cover a mere 6% and experts estimate that the last remaining rainforests could be consumed in less than 40 years.
- Experts estimate that we are losing 137 plant, animal and insect species every single day due to rainforest deforestation. That equates to 50,000 species a year.

Allah has blessed mankind by allowing the use of Earth and all it has to offer to be used:

In the creation of the heavens and Earth, and the alternation of the night and day, and the ships which sail the seas to people's benefit, and the water which God sends down from the sky-by which He brings the Earth to life when it was dead and scatters about in it creatures of every kind-and the varying direction of the winds, and the clouds subservient between heaven and Earth, there are Signs for people who use their intellect." (Surat al-Baqara: 164)

Responsibility and Justice

The Qur'an states that everyone has a responsibility to maintain Earth and the environment.

Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that ((Allah)) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from Evil). (Qur'an 30:41)

"Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the Earth." (Qur'an - 40:57)

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition. (Qur'an 16:90)

Akhter Raouf is an East London based businessman who put this presentation together for the God and Global Warming meeting in November 2005.

The Hindu View

Environment and Hindism

Hindu values consist of a combination of ancient tradition, with core values that have stood test of time and hold the Earth and its habitat as a central parts of human existence on Earth.

Place of Nature in Hindism

- The universe is the divine creation.
- It must be honoured in all its parts, which is made up of: - Animals, plants, mountains and rivers, all form part of the Earth.

Vedic Traditions and Texts

- Value the power of the natural world.
- Vedic hymns highlight centrality of deities and ecological sensitivity within the Hindu tradition i.e. the Earth (*bhu*), the atmosphere (*bhuvah*), and sky (*sva*), with their associated deities Earth (*Prthivi*), water (*Ap*), fire and heat (*Agni*), and the wind (*Vayu*).

Hindu Spirituality - Dharma

It has emphasis on:

- Social responsibility to act for the good of the world.
- Especially when sharing Earth's resources.

Human Responsibility to the Environment - Karma

- Teaches that resources in the world become scarce because people use them for their own ends.
- People should use the world unselfishly in order to maintain the natural balance and to repay God for the gifts he has given.

This is further evident in the Hindu holy text:

For, so sustained by sacrifice, the gods will give you the food of your desire. Whoso enjoys their gift, yet gives nothing, is a thief, no more nor less. (Bhagavad Gita 3:12)

Assisi Declarations (1986) - The Hindu Statement

The following points were put forward during this declaration of religion leaders:

- The human role is not separate from nature.
- All objects in the universe, beings and non-beings, are pervaded by the same spiritual power.
- The human race, though at the top of the evolutionary pyramid at present, is not seen as something apart from Earth and its many forms.
- People did not spring fully formed to dominate lesser life, but evolved out of these forms and human race is integrally linked with them.
- Nature is sacred and the divine is expressed through all its forms. Reverence for life is an essential principle, as is ahimsa (non-violence).
- Nature cannot be destroyed without humanity destroying itself.
- The divine is not exterior to creation, but expresses itself through natural phenomena.
- Hindu prayers, hymns and mantras are often focused on the natural elements of Mother Nature, the Earth and the protection of the environment.

A Peace Prayer

May the Earth, the Sun, the Waters, the Herbs, the Vegetable Kingdom, the learned Sages, Educators, the Meditation, the Knowledge –in brief the entire Universe be free from harm and be conducive to Peace and Happiness.

May this Peace bring higher Peace, which may pervade the whole Universe.

May I too get such Peace.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Cllr Vinaya Sharma is a Hindu representative on the RFF management committee and has been appointed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Ilford Hindu Centre, in Ilford.

The Zoroastrian View

Universal and Ancient

Zoroastrian religion is universally recognised as the world's oldest religion. However, few know that it is also the world's first eco-friendly religion. Injunctions to look after, nurture and care for all natural elements is part of the core doctrines of this ancient religion. There are divine beings appointed to look after each of the seven creations. Misusing or polluting a creation means a direct affront to that divine being. Thus ecology and conservation are closely interlinked with theology and divinity in Zoroastrianism.

Sacred Life

Life is regarded as sacred in Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrians lay great emphasis on the natural elements, their conservation and preservation, as they realise that their life depends on the care and conservation of all natural elements like air, Earth, water, animals and vegetation. Looking after these creations is tantamount to looking after one's own self.

Divine Beings

In Zoroastrian theology, three of the main Zoroastrian divine beings preside over the Earth. They are Spenta Armaiti, Geush Urvan and Zamyād. This shows the importance given by the Zoroastrians to Earth as a creation.

Mother Earth

Earth is considered a Mother. Like a mother, she is tolerant, since she takes in all the waste and garbage that man generates during the course of his life, and in return gives him back blessings of goodness in the form of grains, fruits, vegetables and several other bounties which are the very means of his subsistence.

According to Zoroastrian tradition, it was mother Earth, who, cried out to God – Ahura Mazda - to relieve her of her sufferings and it was in reply to her pleas that prophet Zarathushtra was sent to this Earth.

According to Zoroastrianism the Earth has the power to take in the waste produced by man, transform it to good creations and give it back to man. The Earth however, can bear this burden only up to a certain extent. When man exceeds his limits and burdens the Earth with excessive pollution and inorganic wastes, then the Earth cries out in anguish and pain and these cries of mother Earth often result in natural calamities and catastrophes.

Purity

So much does Zoroastrianism uphold the purity of the Earth and such is the human responsibility to nature and mankind, that the religion prohibits the contamination of any natural element. That is the reason why Zoroastrian tradition enjoins that whenever possible, the corpses should neither be buried nor burned, but exposed to the elements in such a way that they cause least pollution not only to the Earth but all natural elements.

The Earth in particular and nature in general is sacrosanct for all Zoroastrians, and that is the reason that their first act after waking up from their sleep is to bow down to the Earth in reverence and gratitude.

Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia is a leading writer on Zoroastrian affairs. He is the principal of the Dadar Athornan Madressa, in India, which is the training school for sons of priests.

The Buddhist View

Although Buddhism is a doctrine expounded with the aim of spiritual emancipation, it contains a great deal of advice to make the worldly life comfortable and happy.

The Buddhist attitude to nature can be found in many discourses delivered by the Buddha, in different places at different times. The information contained in the earliest collection of Buddhist writings (Tripitaka) shows that the Buddha and Arhats (saints), who had overcome passion, were able to appreciate natural beauty with non-attachment. They also preferred to live in a calm, quiet and congenial environment.

The Buddha emphasised the inter-dependence of all life including the animate and inanimate. He strongly advocated not only to treat life as sacrosanct, but also to respect nature in the same way. The Buddha himself, as Prince Siddharta, was born under the shelter provided by a tree. He attained enlightenment - the supreme wisdom - and his final passing away was under trees. He had his early meditative experience under a Rose Apple Tree.

According to Buddhist texts the first act of Buddha, after his attaining enlightenment was to pay his gratitude to the Bodhi Tree for providing him protection from the elements during his struggle. He had stood in front of the Bodhi Tree with his gaze concentrated on the tree for a period of seven days.

The Buddha highlighted the importance of the conservation of nature. He explained that the environment and man's life bear close affinity and the conservation of nature promotes the general well being of society. The Buddha attached particular importance to Arama Ropa, through the construction of parks or groves, and Vana Ropa through reforestation and the supply of water.

According to Vinaya Pitaka, which is a set of rules for the monastic community, even Buddhist monks are advised to keep their Aramas (temples) clean and tidy and the surroundings verdant. It is in delighted minds that pleasant feelings and thoughts occur, cleanliness of one's own body and the surrounding tend to foster pure thoughts.

Once when Buddhist monks were getting ready to cut down trees in the forest, the Buddha reacted by admonishing that it was defilement and trees should not be destroyed. According to Buddhist literature forests are not only conducive to physical aspects of man but to spiritual aspects as well. Throughout Buddha's teaching we come across many places where he uses the beauty of forests and nature to illustrate points in dharma and to make us more aware of the significance of the environment, which are an integral part.

The Buddhist admonition is to utilise nature in the same way as a bee collects pollen from a flower, neither polluting its beauty nor depleting its fragrance. Just as the bee manufactures honey out of pollen, so man should be able to find happiness without harming the natural world in which he lives. The fundamental for exploiting nature comes from man's unlimited desires. In the Mette Sutta (Buddha's words on goodwill and kindness) he describes the qualities of a person who seeks to promote his welfare. Buddha states that such a person must be; content; easy to be support; not be over busy and simple in living.

If a person adopts this principle as a living guide such a person can do very little harm to the environment.

By Ven. Pethigamuwe Hemaratana from the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre, Ilford.

The Sikh View

Climate change, which cannot be attributed to natural causes, is due to uncontrolled consumerism fuelled by self-centred overindulgence and overuse of natural resources.

The linked issue is that of the responsibility of humankind towards the environment.

There are many compositions in Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scriptures, are devoted to the description of the environment and nature, the changing seasons and the great diversity of life on Earth.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the life-affirming practical theo-social path called "Sikhi", focused on the creator in looking at creation and said he sits and watches over all with joy and satisfaction.

The Sikh gurus regarded the Earth as a place of worship where we meditate upon the lord's name and serve his creation selflessly.

The gurus taught that the creator created the air, which created water and brought life on the "great mother Earth".

In the midst of seasons, wind, water, fire and nether worlds, the wondrous giver of knowledge, set the Earth as his temple so that humankind may learn and practice righteous living.

Therein he created limitless diverse species with own modes of living and ensured a balance through the laws of nature.

In the world god has created he has also provided each species and humans with means of support and nurturing.

Man's duty towards nature is implicit in Sikh teachings. Humankind leads the chain of limitless species and, therefore, carries the responsibility to care for and serve the lord's creation selflessly.

Sikhi condemns a self-centred life style of overindulgence which uses up the Earth's resources, or which upsets the fine balance in nature and the environment.

The Earth in Sikhi is a temple, which must be looked after and not desecrated.

Gurmukh Singh is a retired civil servant and the secretary for British Sikhs Consultative Forum (open variety). He has written many books and articles comparing Sikhism to other religions and is a regular contributor to the Sikh Times.

