

The human population needs to preserve the diversity of life forms not only for their own sakes but for ours too. For example a variety of plants are required to maintain a healthy diet and also for medicinal reasons.

The 7th Guru, Guru Harkrishan Ji, was famous throughout the whole of India for healing people with herbal remedies. There will no doubt exist herbal remedies for some of today's worst diseases. If we preserve the rainforests, we may have a chance of discovering and utilising these remedies for the benefit of humanity.

As a Sikh, one should take an initiative in helping with campaigns to help protect the rainforests. In addition to this a Sikh should also participate in initiatives to help restore trees and forests - a most essential necessity for oxygen breathing life forms.

The Concept of Kar Seva

Sikh dharma stresses the practice of Meditation and Selfless service. It is a combination of both which leads to enlightenment.

'Kar Seva' is unique to Sikh dharma and it involves the working together of an entire community to achieve a goal. This is essentially voluntary work at a very large scale. Examples of this have included the building of the most sacred Sikh shrine in the world - the Harmandir Sahib. The entire building was built by individuals in the local communities volunteering to offer their help. For a Sikh, volunteering oneself to help a community is not just a 'good thing to do' but a religious duty.

This same concept of 'Kar Seva' has been applied by the Sikh community to, for example, clear litter from parts of Delhi's city streets with amazing results. This only works because every individual recognises their duty as an individual to fulfil the aims of a community initiative.

This same principle could be applied to the world for all kinds of initiatives, if all people began to realise the importance of their individual responsibilities in looking after the planet.

Managing the Earth

The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji said, "*Recognise the human race as one unit*". This means that political, national, racial, religious and economic divides are all meaningless.

Sikh philosophy would require all developed nations to help the people of developing nations, to ensure they enjoy the same quality of life as everyone else.

Unfortunately this philosophy is still theoretical. The human race, still does not behave as one unit. One reason for this is that the countries of the world lack the mechanism by which effective communication and co-operation can occur. The desire of the Sikh Gurus was the establishment of a society called the Khalsa (pure ones), that would protect the human rights and freedom of every human being.

This same philosophy applied to the modern world would involve the creation a world government (the Khalsa), which would manage and safeguard the interests of humanity by ensuring proper management of the planet's resources. It would be responsible for ensuring that the actions of the human race are those which benefit everyone. There must obviously be a compromise between the powers of a central world government and the powers of each individual country. However a world assembly (the Khalsa), with a foundation based on selflessness, humility and responsibility may help to halt and even reverse the destruction of our planet.

It is important to remember that the word, 'Khalsa' does not solely refer to baptised Sikhs. It refers to those individuals who are pure by heart and who share the same philosophy. This includes all religious, racial and cultural groups.



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Protect Our Planet

Sikh Dharma

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Introduction

Environmentalism is gaining a much greater importance amongst the people of the world. Young undergraduates studying engineering, applied science and architecture are being taught the necessity of incorporating into the design of new machines, features which minimise harm to the environment and its users.

Unfortunately many of us are still unaware of the significance of our actions and our selfish attitudes on this planet.

Responsibility and Selfless Service

It is impossible for us to improve the environment, until we recognise that we as individuals are responsible for our actions. The Sikh Holy Scripture, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji states, *"we shall reap the results, of the seeds which we sow"*.

For example, if we unsustainably remove trees from the planet, then we are sowing the seeds of our own destruction.

Sikh dharma also commands humanity to follow the principle: 'benefit the whole human race'. This is very much a holistic view which states that we as custodians of planet Earth must perform those deeds which benefit everyone or at least the greatest number of people. However in order for this to work, we need to become less selfish. The Sikh Gurus taught people to be completely selfless by example.

Without selfless, responsible and 'good for all' orientated individuals, communities and governments, any environment improving initiative will be ineffective.

Respect for the Earth

Sikh dharma encourages people to respect and live in harmony with the environment, including animals and plants. The Sikh Holy Scripture (SGGSJ) states, *"Air is the Guru, water is the father and Earth is the great mother. Day and night are like two nurses who look after us"*.

Respect for Mother Earth starts with the little things at an individual level, such as disposing of litter in bins. It is not acceptable for a Sikh to dispose of litter in the street. At a national and international level, respect for the Earth implies the sustainable use of the planet's resources and the responsible use of human technologies such as nuclear energy and weapons.

Respect for All Creatures

The Sikh Gurus were great lovers of animals. Indeed, the 10th Guru is sometimes known as, 'the one with the falcon'. There are many references in the Guru Granth Sahib Ji that refer to the whole of creation as being sacred, because God's spirit permeates through all of it. The SGGSJ states, *"In all beings is the Lord pervasive, the Lord pervades all forms male and female"* (Guru Granth Sahib Ji, p.605).

Sikhs are commanded to respect all forms of life, including animals and plants.

Fossil Fuels, Metals and Minerals

The discovery of fossil fuel has revolutionised human society. Technologies like the car and the aeroplane have greatly enhanced the quality of life of people around the world. We would be lost without our instant access to unlimited amounts of electricity. Alas, fossil fuels may prove to be our greatest enemy.

The harmful substances produced by fossil fuels have resulted in acid rain, high levels of particulate matter in air, destruction of the ozone layer and global warming.

Unfortunately, the requirement of fossil fuels in every country, increases every year. The developed countries refuse to reduce their consumption in fear of losing economic or political power. Whereas developing countries refuse to reduce consumption of fossil fuels because they feel it is their right to 'catch-up' with developed nations. Indeed this trend of fossil fuel usage is applicable to every Earth resource including metals and minerals.

Each time we drive our car we are contributing towards the destruction of Mother Earth. As a Sikh, one must try and live as balanced a life with nature as

possible. Now, it would be impractical for most people to do without a car. However everyone could try to use their car less, and instead walk or cycle or even use public transport. It is the duty of every person to minimise their destructive impact on the environment. It is this same philosophy which should be adopted by communities and by nations - that is, the adoption of a less selfish and more responsible attitude towards the environment.

Sikh dharma teaches people to apply the rule of moderation to everything in life. This includes the use of the Earth's resources for the benefit of humankind.

Agriculture

The Sikh community has always been closely associated with agriculture, simply because it is the primary industry in Punjab. It just so happens that this is also the world's most important industry, an obvious fact which is often overlooked.

Currently, much of human food production is wasteful. Many researchers have shown that rearing animals for food, uses more land than growing vegetable crops. In addition to this, large parts of the Earth's surface are becoming degraded through overgrazing by herds of domestic animals.

As the human population of the world increases, a point will come when meat eating for humans will become unsustainable. People will be forced to adopt a vegetarian diet in order to make the best use of the world's resources.

The Sikh Gurus were all vegetarian and they encouraged all their followers to adopt a vegetarian life style.

The Preservation of Rainforests

Poor methods of agriculture and mining of minerals and metals has been one of the main reasons for the continual destruction and reduction of the planet's rainforests. A majority of Earth's still unknown animal and plant species reside within these rainforests.