

**Papers presented at
Leeds Faiths Forum - Inter Faith Conference on the Environment
at Leeds Metropolitan University
15 March 2009**

A most successful conference was held on 15 March 2009 when 80 people from 6 faiths engaged with crucial aspects of the crisis of our Environment. I have pleasure in reproducing below the papers given by The Rt Hon John Battle MP, and speakers from 5 of the 6 faiths involved: Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Pagan and Hindu.

The following points significantly emerged in the conference:

- The conference recognised the urgency of the threat to our Environment through global warming, and both speakers and workshop leaders emphasised how people of Faith should make this issue a priority.
- The conference showed a remarkable amount in common at a profound level between the 6 Faiths represented. Without any attempt to harmonise the approaches of the different faiths, each faith representative clearly outlined their faith's basic beliefs and how they would be brought to bear on the Environment issue – and the resonance between their views was striking. The urgency of the environmental crisis went to the heart of each faith represented.
- The conference also highlighted an integral link between our morality and the state of the environment. This emerged:
 - in issues of justice, where the poor suffer disproportionately from the effects of global warming;
 - in a basic respect for the Creation of which we are a part;
 - in disillusionment with the economic system and the attitudes of greed which have contributed to the present recession;
 - in recognition of the role of women;
 - in recognition of the importance of the local;
- The conference was remarkable for recognition of the seriousness of the threat to the environment and also the degree of similar spiritual attitude. This suggested great potential for dialogue and joint action among people of different faiths for the good of our shared world. The conference has provided a first step for concerted action between the Faiths in Leeds in tackling environment issues.

A year on from the conference, the following steps have been taken

We have held three Clean Up projects , working through John Cummins and Groundwork and involving 40 people from 5 faiths working in partnership with local residents and organisations, in Halton Moor, Armley and Beeston in Leeds, and more are being planned.

The conference was the initiative of the Leeds Faiths Forum whose role is to articulate the voice and practical contribution of the different faiths working together in Leeds, in particular working with Local Government in the Vision for Leeds agenda. Leeds Faiths Forum is a signed up partner in the Leeds Strategic Plan and is represented on the Narrowing the Gap board.

Charles Dobbin, Vice Chair Leeds Faiths Forum

Harbans Sagoo, Chair Leeds Faiths Forum

7.4.10

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John Battle MP Keynote address on the political & global picture

Climate Change: A Sense of Moral Urgency

In the Sunday Times of 15th of March 2009, there was a special report headed – Plan B: Scientists get radical in a bid to halt global warming catastrophe'. It referred to leading researchers taking an unprecedented political stand over what they regarded as complacent and inactive responses to rising CO₂ levels. At the recent science summit in Copenhagen (in preparation for the December Climate Change Heads of Government Summit coming up) 2500 leading climate change scientists warned that the pace of climate change was accelerating faster than anticipated and unless politicians took drastic action to cut carbon emissions, the world would face irreversible shifts in climate and sooner rather than later. They warned that global temperature increases averaging more than 4°C were now possible and that human-generated CO₂ could also acidify the world's oceans, wiping out life forms ranging from tiny plankton to coral reef. In response, the director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies Dr James Hansen declared that he believed scientists, the people who knew the most about climate change now had a moral obligation to become politically active.

In the week in which Lord Stern (who authored the Stern Report on 'the Economics of Climate Change) gave evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on International Development and argued that the situation is now much more serious since he published his report, the pleas both for a greater sense of both urgency and moral responsibility to act are being stepped up.

Professor Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre, the British government's leading global warming research centre spelt out the need for a "planned global recession" to cut carbon emissions as reduction strategies were making too little impression on the problem. He said "Emissions are rising so fast that we are heading for a world which will be 4°C-5°C warmer than now by 2100. That would be catastrophic. Unless economic growth can be reconciled with unprecedented rates of decarbonisation, it is difficult to foresee anything other than a planned economic recession being compatible with stabilising the climate". He added "scientists have lost patience with carefully constructed messages being lost in the political noise". We must stand up for what we now know.

What we do know is that humanity is globally releasing 50 billion tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere each year – and this is rising by 2%-3% each year, far faster than scientists had predicted. Increases in the earth's temperature, causing drought, extreme flood and storms, and water shortage, rising sea levels threatening low lying land (including major cities – and whole island states), and melting of the World's glaciers are all evident consequences. A table in the Sunday Times set out how rising temperatures could affect the planet this century:

+2°C:

- Equatorial regions: desertify and crops fail
- Australia: crops and livestock fail
- Northern Europe: warmth improves crops

+3°C:

- Alps: end of the ski industry
- Wildlife: widespread extinction across Africa, South America and Asia

+4°C

- Northern Europe: suffers summer heat waves
- Amazon: rainforest die out
- Greenland: ice cap melting

+5°C

- Global: crop failures, billions of people suffer starvation and drought
- Rising seas threaten many cities

As well as famine and drought, unprecedented climate change will result. If then the world's best efforts at combating climate change at present are likely to offer no more than a 50-50 chance of keeping temperature rises below the threshold of disaster (according to research from the UK Met Office), what can we do to ensure we hold the expected increase to 2°C beyond which damage to the natural and to the human society is likely to be catastrophic? Even if all countries in the world engage forthwith in radical and wide-ranging 'crash programmes' to slash greenhouse gas emissions – something which itself is far from guaranteed – what can we do?

Recently, the President of the Maldives announced a plan to make his country carbon neutral within a decade by introducing new renewable electrical generation and transmission (using wind, solar and biomass-burning coconut husks). Without drastic action the whole population of the Maldives will have to give up, declare themselves climate change refugees and seek sanctuary elsewhere. The President announced "The Maldives is in the front line of climate change. It is perhaps the most vulnerable country in the world. If nothing is done to cut carbon emissions the country will sink beneath the seas this century. We don't want to pretend that this plan is going to be easy to implement. There will be hiccups and electricity supplies will occasionally be disrupted. But we think that building a near-zero carbon Maldives is a realistic challenge. Get it right and we will show the apathetic developed world that action is possible and at reasonable cost".

The Maldives is a poor country but it is now "throwing down the gauntlet to the rich high polluting countries". As President Nasheed put it, "climate change is a global emergency. The world is in danger of going into cardiac arrest, yet we behave as if we've caught a common cold".

At least in Britain the Government has introduced a Climate Change Act, generally regarded as the most progressive and challenging in the World. Since 1992, when the UN framework on Climate Change was signed up to by many countries, the need to reduce our carbon emissions was generally agreed. The Kyoto agreement set targets, and recognised that without developing countries being part of a global agreement (and the USA signing up to the targets) then it would not mean real commitments. Britain committed itself to a policy of reducing carbon dioxide emissions to 20% less than 1990 levels by 2010. Switching from coal burning to gas-fired power stations meant some reductions but a long way from the set target: A climate change levy was introduced on businesses, and a landfill tax to push recycling but emissions continue to rise – now 3% higher than 1997. The Climate Change Act made law on 26th Nov 2008 introduced the World's first long term legally binding framework to tackle the dangers of climate change.

That legally binding target – pushed up as a result of lobbying (not least by the faith community) of at least an 80% cut in greenhouse emissions by 2050 is to be achieved through action in the UK and abroad. A reduction of at least 26% in CO₂ emissions is built in for 2020. Both these targets are against a 1990 baseline. And these targets are to be reached by a spelt out carbon budgeting system which caps emissions over 5-year periods, with 3 budgets set at a time to set out our trajectory to 2050. The first three carbon emissions will run from 2008-2012, from 2013-2017 and from 2018-2022, and must be set by 1st June this year. The government must report to Parliament its policies and proposals to meet these budgets as soon as practical after that. International aviation and shipping emissions will be included – or the Government has to explain why not to Parliament by 31st Dec 2012. A new independent expert body – the Committee on Climate change has been set up to advise

Government on the level of carbon budgets and where cost-effective savings can be made. This committee will submit annual reports to Parliament on the UK's progress towards targets and budgets. The Government must respond to these annual reports – thereby ensuring transparency and accountability on an annual basis.

As a result of strong lobbying the Climate Change Act is a good one, but MPs can easily vote for far off targets they will not be around to be called account for failing to reach them. That's why the 3 year budget plans – and sticking to them are so critical.

Last month, however, some backbench MP's (myself included) whilst welcoming the Climate Change Act, pressed the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in an early day motion in Parliament to adopt an immediate target to cut greenhouse gas emissions from the UK by 42% by 2020. We in Britain need not to just encourage other countries to follow our lead – but we need to actively lead by example like the Maldives. We need to inject a new and real sense of urgency.

Particularly in the present global economic crisis it is vital to insist that this is no time to put the climate change agenda on the back burner whilst we try and reset the economic and financial systems back to focus on growth. Rather than seeing this as “a fatalistic tipping pint” (Malcolm?) as the philosopher Karl Jaspers proposed perhaps we should interpret these times as an “axial time” of potential and actual transformation. Now is precisely the time to join together the challenges of tackling poverty (and wealth) and climate change simultaneously. Nor will a simple fiscal stimulus to pump prime ‘green growth’ renewable energy resources be enough. Now is the time to introduce ‘pro-poor policies’ that lead to a social and sustainable economy in which all people in the world have a real possibility of good livelihoods. Rethinking - and reengineering the economy from the bottom up – and by putting people and their need first (thus breaking with the traditions of top down neo-liberal market economics) is now crucial for our survival on this planet.

The faith traditions all in their own way remarkably converge in their insistence on respect for creation – and the creator. With my own Roman Catholic tradition, Pope Benedict XV (in September 2008 addressing young people) stressed that “Before it's too late we need to make courageous choices that will recreate a strong alliance between man and Earth. We need a decisive ‘yes’ to care for creation and a strong commitment to reverse those trends that risk making a situation of decay irreversible”. He emphasised in particular that “protection of water resources and carefulness towards climate change are issues of the upmost importance for the entire human family”. There is a wonderful story of the Prophet (s.a.w) in the Holy Koran stepping into a river to wash for prayers – and taking out a small bowl to scoop up the water he needed for his ablutions – and no more. Documents from the Orthodox Tradition, produced by the Ecumenical Patriarchate ‘Orthodoxy and the Ecology Crisis’ (1990) teaches that humanity both individually and collectively ought to perceive the natural order as a sign and sacrament o God. “This is obviously not what happens today. Rather humanity perceives the natural order as an object of exploitation. There is no one who is not guilty of disrespecting nature, for to respect nature is to recognise that all creatures and objects have a unique place in God's creation. When we become sensitive to God's world around us we grow more conscious also of God's world within us”.

Not only do we now understand that we inhabit a world in which the global is local - and the local global – we are all interconnected and therefore responsible for each other we also know that the structures of our habitation of this planet have changed. For the first time in human history more people live in cities than in rural environments – and most in mega-cities of over 1 million inhabitants. In other words climate change is a particularly urban question of fresh air to breathe, fresh water supplies, transportation, and sustainable livelihoods. Maimonides in the Jewish tradition in the Twelfth Century – as recorded in Jewish texts explicitly warns us “life is more difficult in the city”. We have to address our response to the climate change challenges from with our urban contexts.

The Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita tells us “conserve ecology or perish” and in a dialogue between Sri Kirishna and Arjuna we are reminded that

“living bodies subsist on food grains, which are produced from rains. Rains are produced from performance of Yajna (sacrifices) and Yajna is born of prescribed duties”

It is this emphasis of ‘sacrifice’ that makes the climate change challenge personal – not just in terms of sacrificial rituals but in terms of practical personal social and political action. Our carbon footprint and use of resources is a crucial issue. We particularly in the rich West will have to make personal sacrifices – to live more simply so that others on our planet can simply live.

As we approach the Copenhagen Summit in December, we need to press nationally for international action – for targets and commitments – clear practical steps to get to those targets. We need better international structural responses from bodies such as the World Bank the IMF and the UN to keep us together. We need to see ourselves as part of the problem – and having to make personal sacrifices, and we need it address the issue locally in terms of restructuring basic caring sustainable communities in our neighbourhoods.

We need a new social, political and economic localism that recognises both that the poorest always pay the highest price in economic crisis and also that as the Kenyan Proverb puts it “the earth is not our inheritance to use up but rather is on loan from our children” or as many traditions express it – a gift from the Creator – God.

To conclude with the words of Adrian B Smith in A Reason for Living and Hoping (St Paul’s 2002 p.19)

“It is our vision of reality that is undergoing a monumental change in our present time causing us to perceive and understand ourselves in our relationship – to other people, to our planet and to the Transcendent in an entirely new way”.

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Christian: Ian White

The Rev'd Ian White was Environment Officer for the Anglican Diocese of Ripon and Leeds until Summer 2009 and is now vicar of Adel.

Christianity and the Environment

A couple of years ago, a little book was published. It was called 'How many Lightbulbs does it take to change a Christian?' written by Claire Foster and David Shreeve, National Policy advisers to the Church of England on Environmental Issues. This little book gives lots of hints and tips about how anyone, not just Christians, can do their bit to help reduce their contribution to the damaging actions which affect the environment.

By way of introduction to my presentation, I would just like to read the first part of the introduction to Claire and David's book. They say:

The environment is making headlines in the news almost every day. There is a growing urgency in reports about the capacity of the earth to bear the cost of human activity. Scientists are becoming increasingly concerned and united in their views the more they study climate change. The planet is in a dangerously unstable state and humans have played their part in making this happen.

But caring about the environment isn't just a matter of jumping on a fashionable bandwagon. Christians have been concerned for a long time. The first call to action from the General Synod of the Church of England came in the 1970s. Care for God's creation, as core Christian business, is deeply embedded in Christian tradition and Scripture.

Christians say they believe that the whole creation is made by God, shot through with God's Wisdom. Humans should not aim to be 'masters and possessors of the universe' (as the French philosopher, Descartes, wrote). We are stewards, not exploiters. We believe we must hand on unharmed this exquisitely beautiful and remarkably diverse creation.

So here we have a starting point for relating Christian beliefs with environmental concerns, and the way our response to environmental concerns underpins our faith-based actions. So what else can we say that is fundamental to this approach?

Well, around 18 months ago, the Diocese of Ripon and Leeds adopted its' own Environment Policy. The first paragraph of the policy states that:

The Diocese affirms its commitment to the 5th Mark of Mission of the Church, which calls upon us 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth.' Through this commitment, the Diocese recognises the need for Christian mission to include a responsibility to love and care for the earth; a duty which has been entrusted to us by God.

So here we have the first foundation stone on which Christian concern for the environment is built: care for creation. So from where does this concept arise?

Writing in his 2002 book, 'The Re-enchantment of Nature', the molecular biologist and theologian, Alister McGrath says:

Christianity offers an explanation of the world and our place within it... One of the central Christian perspectives on the world concerns the doctrine of creation. What difference does this make to the way the world is perceived, experienced and valued?

The Old Testament uses a number of illustrations to illuminate the idea of creation. The rich imagery of the Genesis creation accounts is supplemented by many other biblical passages that portray God as a master builder, deliberately constructing the world.

In his book, 'Thinking Biblically about Climate Change', Richard Bull says:

According to the first chapter of Genesis, human beings are part of the created order. They share with the whole of creation the fact of being brought into existence by God. However, unlike the rest of creation, human beings are said to be made in God's image, and created '... that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

The word 'rule', sometimes translated as 'to have dominion over' seems odd in the context of care for creation. And indeed, as Bull says, 'Christians have long been accused by the 'green' movement of using these commands to justify ... an irresponsible and disinterested attitude towards environmental issues.'

But, as Claire Foster and David Shreeve say in their new book, 'Don't Stop at the Lights', 'The reality of environmental degradation has also challenged us to re-examine Christian scriptures and traditions with open minds and an attitude of humility.' And this is certainly the case here.

The commands in Genesis need to be qualified. In the Book Genesis, God tells the man that he has made that he has been given dominion over the animal kingdom. But this must not be understood as mastery, allowing exploitation. Man was made ruler over the animals in the same way that a good king is set to rule over his people. The main purpose of a good king is to care for his charges and to look after them. So man was set the task of looking after the world and its inhabitants.

In the second Genesis creation story, we are told, 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.'

This seems a clear instruction to look after God's creation, not to destroy it. The Hebrew word translated 'take care' has its root in the idea of service, so as James Jones, the Bishop of Liverpool suggests, Christians should see themselves as 'servant rulers' of the earth.

And God made it clear in many other places that all creatures are of equal importance. Man should not act as if superior. For example, after the great flood, when Noah and his animal charges returned to dry land, God set a rainbow in the clouds, saying, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.'
(Genesis 9.12)

And this is repeated in the book of the prophet Hosea, where it says, 'And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground.' (Hosea 2.18)

So it seems quite clear that, as Christians, we should take care of the environment.

Returning to our Diocesan Environment Policy, we can see how this, and more, has been encompassed there in its' second paragraph, which states that:

The whole of creation belongs to God. The Biblical creation stories affirm the goodness of God's creation, and define the role of humans within creation as one of stewardship, taking on a privileged responsibility of care for the earth and every living creature. The dominion over the earth given to humans is to be understood not as a right to exploit, but to nurture, protect and manage sensitively. We are called to care for the complex and fragile ecology of the earth, while recognising the need for responsible and sustainable development and the pursuit of social justice.

And here we see the introduction of two further very important considerations; that of sustainability and social justice. Both of these stem from Christian reading of Scripture, and the teaching of Jesus himself, in which we're urged to 'love our neighbour as ourselves'. (Mark 12.31)

The command that we must **love our neighbour** is key to our Christian understanding, and takes on both a global and a temporal dimension. Globally, we must recognise that the most damaging effects of environmental degradation are likely to be felt first and most severely by those who have little responsibility for the causes of the damage; particularly those in the developing world. And the temporal dimension looks at the potential for suffering in the future, and demands of us that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Put another way, how can we say that we love our children if we do nothing to minimise the damage to the environment of the world that they will inherit?

To conclude, then, I would finish with some words extracted for a recent Christian Ecology Link Report, on the subject of climate change and energy generation, entitled '*Faith and Power*', which describes the proper Christian response to the environmental crisis as one which:

'reflects love of the Creator, expresses care for the whole creation, and is influenced by Christian principles of wise stewardship, peacemaking, justice, loving our neighbours and moderation in consumption.'

Thank you.

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MUSLIM: Fazlun Khalid

Fazlun Khalid is a retired engineer working in the ecology field and has done work with the United Nations on ecology and environmental sciences.

Islamic Foundation for Ecology & Environmental Sciences

“I happen to be among those who believe that the financial meltdown we are witnessing now is good for the environment.

Our rampant consumer life styles which is based on money created by the banks have not only caused global warming – it is depleting scarce resources, causing rampant deforestation, desertification, species extinction, air, land and water pollution and systemic dysfunction of our body systems to the extent, that scientists can claim that there are now over 200 chemicals in each of our bodies which our grandparents did not have.

The root cause of all this is the system of financial intermediation which we have invented for ourselves, based on the universal superstition that the money we carry in our wallets really exists, which of course it doesn't.

The Qur'an says about this matter –

Those who practise riba (usury) will not rise from the grave except as someone driven mad by Satan's touch

Is this not time for massive change? I am now compelled to ask, if there is not something profoundly wrong with our political and financial institutions that have led us today to this state of affairs. Can the system that caused the problem produce the solutions? It is an obvious question for anyone to ask, and I am told that Einstein posed this one some decades ago.

The problem is that we have lost a sense of nature, of being part of the natural world, of belonging to something bigger than ourselves. Our consumerism has driven us to distance ourselves from it, and dominate it, to the extent that there is no awareness that, as we destroy the natural world we destroy ourselves. This is why Edward Wilson, the Harvard biologist, described the human species as an environmental abnormality. The human ego has superseded the divine presence.

The least I can do to begin with, is to remind myself and my fellow Muslims that Islam is about submission, and discharging our responsibilities as khalifah, that is guardians of Allah's, God's, creation. Not dominating it to meet our selfish ends to the detriment of other sentient beings and the entire planet - and, of course our grandchildren.”

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Sikh: Jasjit Singh

Jasjit Singh is currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Leeds examining the transmission of religion among young British Sikhs. How does this transmission take place, and why are young Sikhs seemingly becoming more interested in learning about their faith?

Sikhism and the Environment

The Guru Granth Sahib is the Guru of the Sikhs and the key source of Sikh belief and practice. All quotations used are from the Guru Granth Sahib, with page numbers in brackets:

The Guru Granth Sahib teaches that the Divine:

- **IS ONE** – “There is only the One, the Giver of all life, who I should never forget” (2)
- **THE CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF ALL** – “You are the Primal Being, the Most Wonderful Creator. There is no other as Great as You.” (11)
- **EXISTS IN ALL** – ““The Divine is in everything yet transcends everything” (290)

And also teaches that the Divine is both Transcendent and Immanent – a concept very important in understanding how to relate to the environment. This is a pantheist view of the Divine:

- Pantheism – “A Greek compound word meaning literally ‘everything exists in God’: the belief that God is immanent in the universe, but is also transcendent”
- Nirgun / Sargun – Transcendent / Immanent
- “You have thousands of eyes, and yet You have no eyes. You have thousands of forms, and yet You do not have even one.”(13)
- For Sikhs therefore, the Creator exists WITHIN creation as well as OUTSIDE it.

On the Value of the Environment, the Guru teaches:

- “Nature is omnipresent and is beyond value. Even if one were to know its value, One would become mute whilst trying to describe it” (84)
- “In Nature we see the Divine, in nature we hear the Divine; Nature inspires devotion. In Nature is the essence of joy and peace. The Earth, sky and nether regions comprise Nature. The whole of nature is an embodiment of the Divine. Air, water, fire, earth, dust are all parts of Nature, which the Omnipresent Divine commands, observes and pervades” (464)
- “The world is a store-house of the True Divine; within it the True Divine dwells” (463)

And the Gurus use many examples from Nature, highlighting a very close personal relationship with Nature. It is clear that nature provides the Guru with Divine inspiration:

- “The simal tree is huge and straight, But if one comes to it with hope of shade what will one get? Its fruit without taste, Its flowers without fragrance, Its leaves are of no use. O Nanak, humility and sweetness are the essence of virtue and goodness” (470)
- “The Divine is like sugar, scattered in the sand; the elephant cannot pick it up. Says Kabeer, the Guru has given me this sublime understanding: become an ant, and feed on it.” (1377)
- “Make this body the field, and plant the seed of good actions. Water it with the Name of the Divine who cradles the world. Let your mind be the farmer; the Divine shall sprout in your heart, and you shall attain Liberation” (23)

The Guru Granth Sahib describes the world as a place of worship:

- “By the Divine Command, the earth was created, the true home of Dharma.” (785)
- “Upon that cosmic plate of the sky, the sun and the moon are the lamps. The stars and their orbs are the studded pearls. The fragrance of sandalwood in the air is the temple incense, and the wind is the fan. All the plants of the world are the altar flowers in offering to You, O Luminous Divine. What a beautiful Aartee, this is! O Destroyer of Fear, this is Your Ceremony of Light.” (13)
- “Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all. Day and night are the two nurses, in whose lap the whole world is at play.” (8)

So, what’s gone wrong? The Gurus speak about five vices:

- KAAM – DESIRE
- KRODH – ANGER
- LOBH – GREED
- MOH – ATTACHMENT
- HUNKAAR – EGO
- “Within this body dwell the five thieves: desire, anger, greed, emotional attachment and egotism.” (600)

And they describe how the state of the external is a reflection of the internal. The Gurus teach that the Universe is the macrocosm, and the body the microcosm. The internal state of mind is reflected externally. The state of the environment is therefore a reflection of the condition of humanity:

“That which is inside a person, the same is outside; nothing else exists. By divine prompting look upon all existence as one and undifferentiated; the same light penetrates all existence” (599)

The solution is to turn the vices into virtues. The five vices are to be brought under control and replaced by five virtues:

- SAT - TRUTH
- SANTOKH – CONTENTMENT
- DAYA – COMPASSION
- DHARAM – MORALITY
- DHEERAJ – PATIENCE
- “Practice truth, contentment and kindness; this is the most excellent way of life.” (51)

These are to be nurtured through:

- **AWARENESS** (NAM JAPNA) – “Remember, remember, remember in meditation; the one who is the treasure of virtue.” (178)
- **HONEST LIVING** (KIRTH KARNA) – “By mere talk, people do not earn Liberation. Liberation comes only from the practice of Truth.” (141)
- **SELFLESS SERVICE** (VANDH SHAKNA) – “Those who seek a seat in the Divine Court should dedicate themselves to the service of this world” (26)

In summary, our duties are:

- Recognise that the Divine exists in creation as well as outside it
- Recognise that whatever is happening externally is a reflection of the internal
- Recognise that the focus on greed, attachment and ego leads to exploitation of the environment
- The Gurus teach that humanity should realise the Divine in all of creation and focus on serving the Divine through honest living, contentment, compassion and service.

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Pagan: Rob Martin and Cynthia Dickinson

Cynthia Dickinson is a retired teacher now doing voluntary work for Leeds Concord and Leeds Faiths Forum - amongst others. She is Pagan Federation North East's District Inter Faith Officer.

Rob Martin is a self-employed story teller and trainer in community development and CVS management. He is also the Pagan Federation's Local Co-ordinator for Bradford and Halifax areas.

Pagans & the Environment

Good afternoon. My name's Rob, I'm a self-employed story-teller and trainer in community development and voluntary sector management. I am also the Pagan Federation's Local Co-ordinator in Bradford and Halifax.

Cynthia is a retired teacher who does voluntary work with Leeds Concord and Leeds Faiths Forum. She is the District Interfaith Officer for Pagan Federation North East.

As Rob has just mentioned, we are members of the Pagan Federation, which is a nationwide network organisation with an information and campaigning side.

The PF's first principle is "Love for and kinship with nature and reverence for the life force and its ever-renewing cycle of life and death"

Paganism is all about the environment, Mother Earth, Earth Goddess, earth as a living organism, who in partnership with the sun provides for all our needs. Humans and animals, as well as all plants, have a symbiotic relationship with the earth.

To Pagans the Earth is sacred and there are places where the combination of landscape, sun, moon and planets make a strong spiritual connection. Our ancestors had the time, inspiration and ability to create monuments, large and small, throughout the country from the islands of Scotland to the tip of Cornwall. And although there is no written documentation, what evidence we have shows a deep knowledge of astronomy and geometry plus amazing construction skills.

These monuments are still with us today – Callanish, Castlerigg, Men an Tol, and Stonehenge.

Today's Pagans, while admiring and feeling connections with these grand monuments, and occasionally visiting them on special occasions, generally choose somewhat smaller scale and less well-known sites for their rituals.

This stone circle is by the Aire-Calder canal at Stourton, east Leeds and is regularly used by local Pagans for seasonal celebrations.

There are other modern circles in farmers' fields and some Pagans even build them in their gardens.

Others prefer to choose a special place and make it sacred. It might be indoors where natural materials are used to create an altar, reflecting the changing seasons.

Or out of doors ... on the moors, by a river, near the sea, in the woods where they can connect with nature and the changes that occur.

There are many Paths within the Pagan traditions

Celtic, Druid, Heathen, Northern, Shaman and Wiccan, to name but a few.

All are quite different and have their own ways of doing things, but the majority of Pagans recognise eight major festivals to celebrate the changing of the seasons, acknowledging birth, blossoming, harvest, death and rebirth.

Everything is cyclical, the seasons follow a circular pattern – no beginning or ending, all connecting and continuing, interdependent and equally valued.

For the purpose of this talk we start in February with Imbolc, the first signs of spring and new beginnings;

- then Eostre, spring equinox, light and dark in balance, new growth evident;
- Beltane is the time for partnerships and mating;

- summer solstice shows the world in bloom, time of the longest day and shortest night.

- At Lughnassadh we celebrate the first fruits

- and the autumn equinox brings the main harvest when once again day and night are equal but this time darkness will increase.

- Samhain marks the end of harvest and thoughts of death, time to remember our ancestors;

- then winter solstice with the longest night, sees the rebirth of the sun.

We have no recognised scriptural authority, we communicate directly with the Divine. We are expected to think for ourselves, take responsibility for our own actions, consider everything we do and the impact it has on our Mother, Earth.

This means thinking carefully about how we live, what we eat, how we travel, what we buy. It means being aware that we are part of nature, that we need to work with nature rather than simply seeing it as a resource.

A Pagan Federation member offered the following contribution –

“The Earth is our mother in a very real sense, not an imaginary one, because everything alive on this planet springs from Her, returns to her and springs from Her again, renewed.

We, her human children, have grown up now, and are becoming forces of nature in our own right. Like badly behaved adolescents, we are vain and greedy, showing off our increasing power in destructive ways. But we have become too strong and numerous for this not to matter.

Our careless behaviour has strained the structure of the natural "house" which shelters and feeds us, polluting its systems and devouring its resources. The Cornucopia, the lavish bounty of Nature, is proving to be finite, though our appetite and wastefulness are boundless.

There is a real possibility of bringing our ancestors' house crashing down around our ears. It is time to accept the responsibility of collective adulthood: to share the care of nature with the Old Ones, our ancestors, and replace our destructive behaviour with one of care and conservation.”

For Pagans, the environment is at the centre of our faith and there are many ways to put our beliefs into practice.

Pagans may choose to be vegetarian or vegan, not necessarily because they see anything ‘wrong’ in eating meat, but they see a lot wrong in modern factory farming of animals and are aware of the ‘carbon footprint’ it creates. Others eat meat when they know the animals have had a good, natural life.

Lots of Pagans have a vegetable patch in their garden or an allotment, most grow something – even if it is only a window-box of herbs for use in cooking.

Similarly many Pagans choose Fairtrade – for this not only helps people in the Third World but also the environment. Fairtrade producers are encouraged to grow native crops as organically as possible. By using fewer chemical fertilisers and pesticides they are in fact creating a cleaner, healthier environment with improved biodiversity.

Energy conservation is another area of concern – careful use of gas, electricity and water – choosing public transport over the car; recycling; thinking before buying; making and mending. Fairly small things on their own, but useful contributions nevertheless.

The Pagan Federation has its own annual day of action known as Earth Day, the nearest Sunday to April 21st, when members do something practical, using their physical energy to improve the environment – clearing rubbish from local beauty spots, general conservation work or tree planting.

They then join together in an attunement, focusing their spiritual energy on protecting the Earth. This can be done alone or in groups, around the home or out in the countryside, the act is synergetic – the combined effort of hundreds of Pagans working together, all over the country.

One of our Leeds members, here with us today, has organised a litter-picking session for Sunday April 19th at the modern stone circle by the Aire-Calder canal at Stourton.

I will be doing something in Wakefield while Rob will be busy in Bradford.

Although we may have only one organised Earth Day we are well aware that for us, as Pagans, Every Day is Earth Day.

**Papers presented at
Leeds Faiths Forum - Inter Faith Conference on the Environment
at Leeds Metropolitan University
15 March 2009**

Hindu: G.R.K.Sastry

Dr G.R.K.Sastry is a senior lecturer in the Genetics department of Leeds University

**Environmental Protection: Lessons from Ancient Hinduism
Lalita Kanvinde and G. Rama Krishna Sastry**

Present problems of environment and its protection in India are no different from any of those in other overpopulated countries – perhaps they are even worse! Attempts to solve them – not with much success, if one may say so -- are also not different from rest of the world. Therefore, I am not going to waste precious little time at my disposal discussing those aspects. What I shall do, instead, is to take a look into ancient practices in India and see what lessons one can learn from them.

In those years:

- A) Keep every place fit for prayer – in the Vedic times there were no special places like temples for worshipping. Why and how they developed?
- B) Hindu philosophy claims that every aspect in creation is divine as it is the ‘work’ of God Himself. This philosophy caused great respect for the environment and its components. When all the animals and plants are considered holy because they contain divine elements, they were protected from the destruction by greedy human-animals! Cows, tortoises, elephants and Tulasi (=Holy Basil) are some examples. It’s true that according to Hindu thinking God appears in more forms than humans themselves! A similar attitude to *Gingko biloba* (A living fossil!) helped to save that beautiful tree in China. A negative example is Neem tree in India. Not long ago, the country was full of these lovely trees. There was a strong belief (still there is) that air from this tree prevents smallpox epidemics. It’s a common story how the human greed resulted in the disappearance of this tree within a short period!
- C) Ancient Indians found ways and means of peaceful co-existence even with wild animals such as tigers and snakes! Such co-existence was essential as most of the spiritual knowledge was developed by saints living and meditating in deep forests. “We respect your children and you respect mine!” is how my mother used to pray on the special snake – Puja day! Hunting rights were confined only to the members of the Royal Family and this was undertaken only one beast or beasts gone out of order and needed to be put down. This combined with vegetarianism (either limited or complete) helped to respect life even other than human.
- D) There were of course several mistakes were committed (Not all old is gold!) due to ignorance and later on due to greed. Development of hallucinatory drugs such as opium and Ganja are good examples. Once such mistakes were discovered serious disciplinary religious sanctions were imposed but only with limited effect.
- E) Thus, strong religious discipline, faith and lack of greed were very effective in providing environmental protection. But once such faith and discipline were gone due to the influence of Western ways of life and values, its chaos! As a result a luxuriously green country is becoming a thick concrete jungle! Once India was a country with few cars. Soon it would be cars with no country!
- F) It’s well established fact that education, particularly education of women, is positively correlated with absence of population explosion. Such education coupled with respect to women (Hinduism is the only religion that worships woman as God!) helped the situation considerably.