

# *Dhamma and Environmental Preservation*

ธรรมะและการอนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อม



พระธรรมโกศาจารย์ (ประยูร ธมฺมจิตฺโต), ศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ราชบัณฑิตกิตติมศักดิ์  
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Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute

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Preservation*



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The Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dhammacitto)

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Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) has been privileged to witness and play a crucial role in developing and hosting successful UNDV celebrations from the beginning in 2004/2547 to 2011/2554 (except in 2008/2551 – the celebrations were held in Hanoi, Vietnam). As always, we are all very grateful to the Royal Thai Government for its constant support, and thank the Thai Supreme Sangha Council for its blessings, guidance and support. We are indebted, also, to the United Nations for recognizing the thrice-sacred Buddhist holy day.

It has been 2554 years since the death of our Great Teacher, and we have gathered here from across the globe, from many nations, to again pay tribute to his birth, enlightenment, and death – occurring on the same day in different years.

For the celebrations this year, the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU), created during the UNDV in 2007/2550 by the participating



Buddhist higher institutions, plays an important role. The IABU Secretariat now plays a major role in our celebrations, particularly in the academic program of the conference.

This publication could not have been possible without the persistence, hard work, and dedication of MCU's scholars and staff. I wish to thank all members of the International Council for Day of Vesak and the Executive Council of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, and the Editorial Committee for their devotion. I am also grateful to our many donors, sponsors, and volunteers.

*P.D. Kosajarn*

*The Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn*

Chairman, ICDV & IABU  
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# *Dhamma and Environmental Preservation*<sup>1</sup>

*The Most Venerable Professor Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn  
Rector, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University*

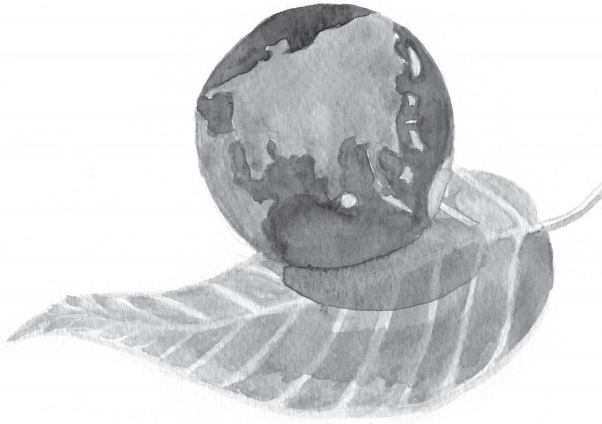


A human being desires for the growth and progress of his own life, relatives, friends, and his nation. In development of this progress, one wants prosperity continuously to grow along the path desired. Nevertheless, some foundations of development are fast-growing, while others are left behind. Hence, development of either a country or life must be balanced or integrated as the foundation.

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<sup>1</sup>A sermon made at Radio Thailand, Public Relation Department, Sunday 22 September B.E. 2534 (1991) - transcribed and translated by MCU PhD Students & Staff and reinterpreted and edited by Mr. Dion Peoples, PhD Candidate, for Vesak Day 2009





In achieving goals of life, some progress rapidly in work, duties, and social status, whereas some take slow steps, or perhaps stand still. Those who stand still are often left behind or led by others.

What should we do in order to speed up progress? This is the question of one who wants growth in life. Growth or prosperity is not only a story for life but for the nation as well. Let us look at national development, as an example. Some countries have rapid growing economic and social development within only a few years. How could they make such a quick move like this?

How should we speed up the progress of our lives so that we could grow like a tree growing higher night and day? Why do some countries aim at a very high growth rate, and can attain an even higher rate? What



should we do for our country which is now marching through the 10<sup>th</sup> Economic and Social Development Plan to reach its goals successfully? It is important that every foundation of the nation needs to be developed in a balanced way, and not only focus on one foundation while the others can't keep up.

One of the teachings of the Buddha, the “Wheels of Progress,” is better analogous to a car moving by its four wheels. The wheels have to move properly together with the body of the car. If any wheel falls apart, the car won't work. Thus, a life with wheels could move quickly and progressively. But a life with imperfect or no wheels could make progress very difficult. Also, our nation could develop fast if it had wheels - of course, wheels leading to prosperity, not to devastation.





## *The Wheels of Development:*

Wheels leading to progress are called “*cakka*”. The *cakka* or *wheel* consists of 4 elements:

1. *Patirūpadesavāsa* – living in a suitable region, living in good or favorable environment
2. *Sappurisūpassaya* – association with good people, relying on a good person
3. *Attasammāpanidhi* – setting oneself in the right course, aspiring and directing one self in the right way
4. *Pubbekatapuññatā* – having formerly done meritorious deeds, resulting in supporting oneself to find a way to success



These are the four-cakkas, or virtue-like wheels leading us to higher growth or prosperity. It is analogous to an assembled car with wheels, able to move forward and rapidly.

Let us consider our lives in order to see if we have all four-cakkas or not. This means that when wanting to do your work or run your business in order to reach prosperity, you have perhaps a missing element. For instance, are you in a proper environment or not; in a suitable region or an area that is appropriate for your work or not? If you want to do farming, consider if the region you live suitable irrigation or not. If you want to run a business, consider if the area or place is good for your business or not. Does the facility have good infrastructure, modern utilities, road access, electricity, telephone, or any other modern communication technology?

In a country with highly competitive business environment, communications technology is the core infrastructure for business. When stock prices surge or slide downward, people become informed rapidly because of the assistance provided from modern technology. All of these countries, therefore, have developed such telecommunications technologies, computer networks, telephone systems, or mobile phone networks - all good for running business. This is called a “good environment”. Also, you should consider about your life, if you are living in a suitable environment or not. If not, you have to find





or build a good environment to live in. Secondly, if you have already lived in a suitable region, are you associated with good people?

**There are two kinds of environment: the natural environment and the social environment:**

To be associated with good people is to search for such good social environment, good neighbors, good colleagues, and a good supporting supervisor - this would be known as “creating good human-relations”. If you have no good friends as your supporters, you might get in trouble. It might be difficult for you who have no good friend to reach the top or get success. And when you want to run a business, from whom could you borrow money? Do you yourself have good credit? When you want to handle a big job, can you find a trustworthy person to help?

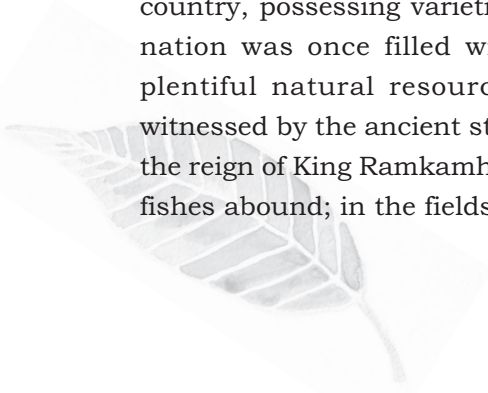
According to an old proverb, it said: “***a bird without feathers and a man with no friends, neither reach the top***”. More importantly, having one good friend who is able to help you a lot, is a better than having a hundred friends who all were jealous of you. Thus, having good friends or having association with good people is an important wheel leading us to success and prosperity. Presently, if a man is favored by a high-ranked and powerful person, he is really lucky. If one is going to rise but is thwarted, someone must do something against him. This is called “clay sticking to the wheel”.



Hence, having association with good people is essential for success and progress.

Thirdly, if you have a favorable environment and have relations with good people, you yourself must be good too, from positioning yourself well. Here, I mean positioning yourself nearby such wholesome things and avoiding such unwholesome things as gambling or a gambling-addict, indulgent-drinking, or a nighttime street-roamer. Do not allow your life to be associated with such bad things. Instead, do allow your life to be drawn near such goodness as diligence, honesty, and morality. If you have positioned yourself appropriately, you will receive esteem for your good conduct, reliability, and responsibility. Everyone would like to have you join or work for them.

Finally, one must have “*puñña*”. Here, this means having previously done praiseworthy deeds, from acquiring good education, good health, and being well-off. These will support you like a savings-account for self-development. Thailand once was a fast growing country, possessing varieties of good foundations. The nation was once filled with a perfect environment, plentiful natural resources, and forests. This was witnessed by the ancient stone inscription derived from the reign of King Ramkamhaeng the Great: “in the river, fishes abound; in the fields, there is rice.”





## *Environmental Problems:*

Currently, natural resources are deficient or are destroyed, so Thai people face heavy losses. The rainy season has changed. Forests are destroyed from illegal logging and without being worth the expense to regenerate the forests. The rivers and canals are polluted. The air is also polluted from toxins and human pollution.

Much of the problems are based on uncontrolled situations. If we want to progressively develop the nation, we have to revitalize deficient areas and take good care of existing natural resources. Therefore, natural environmental cannot be left eroded or destroyed; it will cause lots of problems. For example, forests are destroyed without any good plans to regenerate or revitalize the newly uncovered area with seedlings or substitute-species. The government only recently announced policies to conserve forests in 1985, but maybe this was too late. The policies are the Nature Conservation Act, Natural Resources Exploitation Act, and Environmental Protection Act – which planned and announced to protect the forest. The planned-figure should stand at 40% around the country. However in 1989 it was found that the forest was reduced to 28% around the country, and today we tragically report that suggestions claim less than 20% of the nation is forested. Thus, the Forest Ministry has planned to plant trees to increase forests to 39 million rai to get the target-forests back to 40% around the country.





## *Why Forests?*

Forests provide humidity which enables rain to fall. When it is raining, forests maintain or store amounts of water, to prevent abrupt erosion and serious-flooding - this is a natural function and mechanism. If there are no forests, droughts ensue; additionally if it does rain, areas become susceptible to floods or flash-flooding, depending on the terrain. If there is no forest, wildlife is impacted. These situations, in Pāli, are called *paticcasamuppāda* which is the phenomenon of cause and effect. It means nothing can exist by itself. “*When this thing exists, that thing exists too. When this thing is extinct, that thing is also extinct*”. Buddhist teachings recognize that all things are interdependent and conditional upon each other. Every condition follows

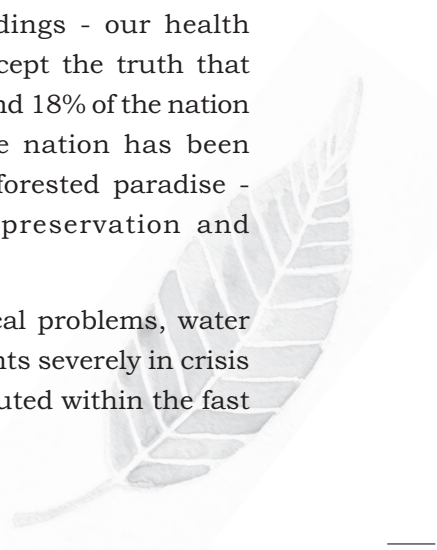


another and all are part of an orderly sequence of cause and effect. This relationship is named ***specific conditionality***.

Ancient Thais have understood this law of condition so they said that “boats depend on water, Tigers rely on forest, the workers depend on boss, and slaves rely on masters.” On the other hand they said “Boss depends on servants, Masters rely on slaves, forest relies on tigers, and water depends on boats.” They explain: *“The tigers are healthy because of the forest. The forests are still maintained because of tigers. The soil is rich because of the protection of grasses. Grasses survive from rich soil.”*

These demonstrate that nature and environment can be balanced without human interference. The forest will naturally grow and varieties of animal species will survive. We can hear birds singing. Trees provide oxygen that enables fine weather. This improves conditions for living beings with better surroundings - our health improves as well. However, we accept the truth that forests are destroyed and stand around 18% of the nation – this is a serious situation. The nation has been transformed from a once tropical-forested paradise - urgently mandating immediate preservation and conservation.

Apart from the above ecological problems, water which is one of the 4 physical elements severely in crisis now too. Rivers and canals are polluted within the fast





and uncontrolled development and pollution. The Chao Phraya River which is the main water resource for the Central Region's provincial areas and to Bangkok, in the south, will be dying soon. In 1990, there were 51,500 factories which released approximately 500,000 tons per year of wastewater into the many water resources or tributaries. Chemically polluted water needs a long time to be diluted. Rivers and creeks everywhere are crying. Water - she will not forgive us, although we asked for forgiveness by floating little baskets containing non-biodegradable platforms for flowers, a candle, and incense into the rivers during every Loy Krathong Festival. Recently though, 100% natural floats have been encouraged – made from bread or banana-stalks. The Government has announced the Laws and Regulations to the factories that they should have the machines to eliminate the wastewater. In 1996, factories released approximately 730,000 tons of wastewater. That was serious environmental crisis. Toxic and polluted air or wind (one of the 4 physical elements) from factories and vehicles also make life difficult. It can be concluded that humanity is not really humane or friendly to the environment – as we witness the crimes we inflict upon our planet.

When the environment is destroyed, living-beings have difficulties living. The fact is clear: living beings and the proper environment cannot be separated. They





must live and survive together. Living beings depend on their environment and the environment relies on living beings too. That means we should use the Buddha's dependent-origination, or Dhamma teachings in our daily way of life.

If the environment degrades and worsens, one of the wheels of Dhamma-doctrine, *patirūpadesavāsa* becomes affected. *Patirūpadesavāsa* means to reside or live in a suitable region or place, so the development of country becomes undesirable. We can compare *patirūpadesavāsa* as the vehicle, if one day we drive a car with one of the wheels lost, it might fall to an abyss. It is in danger and risky. These two stories are similar. Therefore the environmental problems must be solved as fast as possible to recover fine places for living. For example, green forests ensure the rain-weather will come with proper amounts of precipitation, enabling wildlife to live in safety. The rivers and creeks can run clear and clean. The atmosphere improves as well. This is not a dream. This can come true by our friendly behavior towards everything in our surrounding environment. We must accept the environment has worsened from humanity's defilements and craving, and the forest have been degraded from our immense greed. The Buddhist teaching told us that the greed is absolutely bad behavior.





## *Gratitude towards Nature:*

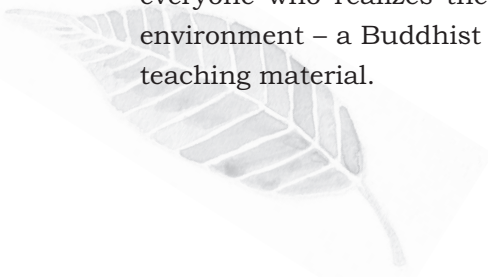
It becomes necessary to control humanity's greed once we realize the value of the natural environment. Our ancestors have taught us that we cannot cut trees which we use them as our roofs or the shade. All the trees are grateful to us for allowing shade from the sun. This reflects the Buddhist teachings in one of the doctrine *kataññūkatavedī* or the gratefulness. *Kataññutā* (gratitude) refers to knowing the done favor; *katavedī* (grateful) refers to one who reciprocates the done favor. Human should be thankful for nature. The gratefulness is not only for behaving between human and human but also for behaving among living beings and things or objects such as roads to our houses. Hence natural surroundings are helpful for us. They provide us the accommodations and other comfortable things. We have to protect natural surroundings from harmfulness. *Kataññūkatavedī* refers to one who is thankful for benefits received and reciprocates them. It is a symbol of good persons like a proverb: *One who is thankful for benefits received and reciprocates them. That is the symbol of the good.*

The Good create various things; the Bad always destroy every thing. We should protect trees, roads, water pipes, power-lines, and all other public utilities. These are belongs to us and they are helpful. It is called gratefulness and we should follow *kataveditā* –



be thankful for benefits received and reciprocate them. When we realize the value of grove or forest, we do not destroy them because of our greed or lack of knowledge. Forests are the watersheds; they retain water and release it gradually throughout the year. Human cannot survive without them. We have to cultivate and protect forests.

The Buddha represented himself as a good example for the gratefulness. After he enlightened and returned to his father's kingdom, Kapilavatthu, to preach his father. The Buddha paid the gratitude to his father and the royal-family and he also paid respect to the surroundings. He was reminded of the Bodhi Tree which he sat and meditated until he got enlightenment to be the Buddha – this is the Standing Buddha Image called, in Thai: Prangthawainet. After reaching Enlightenment, he rose from his seat and walked a distance of 10 fathoms. He stood and held his right hand to left hand. His eyes were immovable fixed upon the Bodhi Tree absorbed in intense meditation which he sat for seven days. In fact it was clear the Buddha would like to pay respect and gratitude to the tree – this Buddha Image is again called Prangthawainet, and represents one who was born on Sunday. In fact, this Buddha Image is for everyone who realizes the value of nature or natural environment – a Buddhist teaching by using nature as teaching material.





The Buddha lived around forests for most of career. From history, we learn he was born at a place called Lumbini where there was a magnificent royal grove. He became enlightened in the forest under the Bodhi Tree. He traveled and preached at the monasteries mostly located in the forests. The first Buddhist Monastery was named Veluvana which means Bamboo Grove. Another Monastery was Jetavana Mahāvihāra which was the garden of Prince Jeta or Jeta's Grove as well as the Monastery of Mango Grove, Jīvākambavanārām. All Buddhist monasteries during the Buddha's time were located in groves or forests. The Buddha realized the value of forests. He encouraged the monks to travel on



foot, shunning society. Monks lived in the forest or under trees. Some monks lived in the forest and continued ascetic practices to remove defilements in the forests. In the reign of King Lithai of the Sukhothai dynasty, many forest monasteries had been built. They are called *Araññavāsī* – referring to monks who dwell in the forest. The opposite of the *Araññavāsī* is the *Gāmaavāsī* that is a town-dwelling monk.

However, monasteries or temples must be the places full of pleasure. They should be close to nature like the monasteries or temples on Buddha’s time. As good Buddhists, we must follow the Buddha who lived and died in the forest. He preached us to pay respect to nature. For example, monks cannot cut trees, dig ground, pass stool and urine or spit on trees, in rivers or creeks. These illustrate teachings that would bring the monks closer to the forest. Some monks loved the forest and conserved the forest. We should further encourage them to do so because they follow the Buddha’s footsteps.

The Buddha said in the Sutta called Vanaropa Sutta that the cultivation the forest and protection the water shed are merit and wholesome. *“They who plant orchards, who plant groves, who build bridge, who set up sheds by the roadside with drinking water for the travelers, who sink wells or build reservoirs, who put up various forms of shelter for the public, are those in whom*



*merit grows by day and by night.*” These are the most useful and helpful activities for all in society. When usage occurs, donators gain merit immediately, day and night. These protect the natural surroundings.

The protection of natural environment is identical as following or practicing dhamma in gratefulness. If we can do, we are *patirūpadesavāsa* or living in a suitable region which will lead us towards progress like the vehicle moving with all four wheels. We have good friends, personality, and profiles that will bring us a prosperous future.





# Religion Solving the Environmental Problems



Environmental crisis is a global problem. The United Nations (UN) held a conference on the topic of “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 3-14 June 1992. There were the Leaders and Execu-tives from 179 countries, attending conference. The World Community declared and signed five documents which relate officially to Sustainable Development for the first time as follows:



*Environment issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment “including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and*

*the opportunity to participate in decision making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.*

It was obviously noticed that the Former World Conferences in the past decade always discussed atomic warfare. It was a serious threat because atomic bombs can demolish the World. However the situation allegedly changed owing to the Soviet Union's unraveling or collapse. This problem was diminished over time, although terrorism is the contemporary concern.

At present the world faces new problems; Thailand has additionally realized the importance of environmental problems and crisis, as the nation is afflicted with several. It was written as a policy in the Seventh Economic and Social Development Plan for the Ministry of Science and Energy to take responsibility in managing or rectifying the mentioned issues. Later the Ministry of Science and Energy was redesignated as the Ministry of Science Technology and Environment. It was very evident to confirm to Thais to believe in the value of the environment and realize the effects that humanity imposes upon the earth. Many parties and NGOs joined together to fight these problems, without religion to guide their principles or to pool resources.



## *The Significant Roles of Environment:*

This conference demonstrates that religious organizations have started taking roles in eliminating environmental crisis. The term: “environment” has closed our eyes to two crucial criteria: natural environments such as forest, hill and river, and manmade environments such as community, buildings, and vehicles. If we employ our lives correctly, environment problems could be solved through our religion teachings. Again, Buddhist teachings taught us: “*patirūpadesavāsa*” - live in environments that are conducive and beneficial for life.

To live in suitable surroundings will provide or improve our righteousness or dhamma in our mind. When we have righteousness or dhamma in our mind, we will bring benefits or good-will to environment too. The environment will get advantages in many ways. Why do we have to discuss the world environment? It does not mean that we are worried by these problems. The world is still the world. The world is not interested in benefits from us. Although the scientists have predicted the world will survive and exist for at least thousand millions years.

However, environmental problems can still affect all livings beings; we must manage the problems correctly in order to survive and live our lives happily. Therefore we must change our habits or way of life, ways of



thinking, and the management of the development process. It is our duty and responsibility to maintain the world as a suitable and perfect place for our offspring. As the Buddha said “*All of us have hospitality to the future generations*”. Thus, we hold this conference to determine Buddhist teachings for solving environmental problems. If humans lived correctly with religions, they would reduce the mentioned problems.





## *The Environmental Problems:*

Again, currently - the environmental crisis is highly unsuitable: *patirūpadesavāsa*. The environmental problems started and are rooted in human misbehavior. In the Pali Cannon, the Buddha taught us if we misbehave away from righteousness, the Moon and the Sun will travel wrongly. The weather will be chaotic and the rain will not fall in the rainy season. The agricultural products will not be met the target-needs that farmers necessitate. Livelihoods are affected and face serious problems.

The Christianity's Bible noted human misbehavior, so God often punishes them and changes the world for good people. God provided continuous heavy rains for forty-days causing global flooding. Humanity drowned except one good family that harvested different animal and plant species into their ark-ship.

In Thailand we believe that one who misbehaves will be punished by nature. The abnormal elements (earth, water, air or wind, and fire are to be understood as the primary qualities of matter) will shift within us. For example, if earth is in arid conditions, if we do not have the policy to protect the forests, they would be rapidly destroyed – to approximately 5%. It is predicted that in 2021, forests will completely vanish. In 1981, Thai Government announced a strong policy that

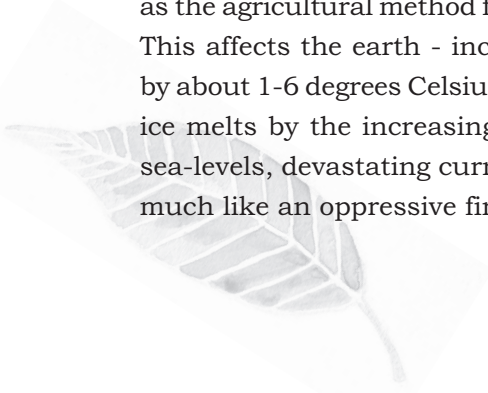




the forest had to increase to 40% around the country. In fact it was clear at that time, that the forest merely stood around 28%. We can plant a tree in a day, but we can cut an acre of trees in a day too. It takes a minute to cut a full-grown tree, but it takes 100 years for it to return to its grand size. We must plant trees, everywhere.

There is a serious water crisis. In 1990, more than 51,000 factories around country released some 500,000 tons of wastewater per year into the various water resources: rivers, canals and creeks. Factory-owners like to minimize costs to maximize profits. At the same time, households and offices released wastewater directly to the rivers also, without undergoing treatment processes.

Air is resultantly polluted by carbon dioxide from burning coal and exhaust from factor chimneys and automobiles. Bangkok residents, alone, through modern technology emit more than 7.1 tons of carbon-dioxide per person. These lead to the environmental disaster known as the *greenhouse effect*. This gas traps heat from the sunshine so it inhibits heat to escape – much as the agricultural method for growing specialized-crops. This affects the earth - increasing global temperatures by about 1-6 degrees Celsius, by the year 2100. The polar ice melts by the increasing temperature and will raise sea-levels, devastating current coastal areas – so this is much like an oppressive fire element.





The crisis of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Air or Wind and Fire became environmental problems because of humanity's greed, delusion and hate. The forest became degraded or destroyed because of humanity's greed. Thus, the Buddha taught us that we should feel content or happy and satisfied with our belongings, because it is unwholesome to be greedy. Lives of living beings are easily killed from anger. Humanity would like to be the masters over all of nature. This is delusion because the world pushing or fighting back and we recognize the signs.



### *Human Beings as the Protectors of Nature*

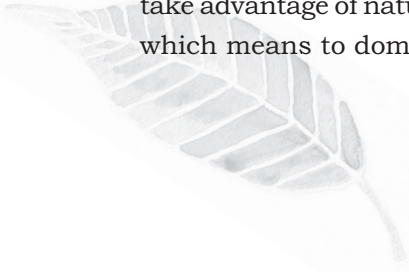
The role of religion in the previous times would protect and save humanity from fearful feelings. Religions were born from human feeling fear. When the rain, thunder, and lightening occurred, humans, as some still are, became afraid of the natural phenomenon. They prayed for a god to safely protect them. They believed that a supernatural being was behind the natural events.



They prayed for a deva or god to guide or protect them from harm. Nature was saved in the past from the role religions played in daily life. Religion played an important role in relating humans to nature – through honoring *Vayu* (God of Wind), *Prithvi* (Mother Earth), the Ganges River, and Agni (God of Fire) – represented or acting respectfully as wind, earth, water, and fire.

It was obviously shown in the past that human lived well with nature by respectfully yielding; currently though, science and technology has developed and progressed to where humans endeavor to conquer and control nature.

In some religious teachings, God built the world as the place for human to live. Animals were created for human subjective use and consumption. These ideas influenced science and technology, so scientists and technologists preconceive to rule the world by trying to win over nature. Humanity has managed to rule the world; has centered themselves to dictate over all other living beings and nature. They feel free to gain benefits and or exploit and destroy the natural environment. Everything depends on humanity's ability to limit desires; this acknowledges humanity does indeed, ignorantly, take advantage of nature. This is a kind of *attādhīpateyya*, which means to dominant influence by oneself.





In fact, humans should understand that animals were not created to be subjected to humanity's oppression and servitude. Nature was for humanity to foster and develop for the necessities of living. Humanity is more like a warden or guardian to protect nature; humanity was not developed to be masters of the universe. This is the correct and positive way of thinking in Buddhism. Everything is relative, interdependent, and interconnected and nothing is absolute or independent. Thus, no first cause is accepted by Buddhism. This is called interrelation. When there is this, there is that; because this is not, that is not.





Humanity depends on nature and nature depends on humanity. Therefore, we can conclude that humanity cannot survive if nature is destroyed.

For chains in nature - each factors of Dependent Origination is conditioned as well as conditioned consequently. The chains in nature are destroyed in many ways by humanity's greed, from being power-mad, and self-dependent. They do not follow the Middle Way or Middle Path to know how to utilize everything properly. If humans would like to solve environmental problems, they must take good care of nature by comprehending the principles of dependent origination.

The major religions in the world provide the teachings to us to prevent the nature and treat to all living beings with kindness and love. We always love nature and living beings because they are created by God. Therefore, loving kindness must be acted; it is the way to learn to love. We must treat to nature with loving kindness and non-violence. We started from the right view or right understanding, to be all relatives, interdependent and interconnected. We have to treat to nature without greedy and delusion.





## *The Right View Relating to Nature:*

If we would like to change our way of life to be harmonious with nature, we must release or stop greed, anger, and delusion. Human beings should spend their lives in the middle way or middle path which started with right view towards the natural environment. Here is a poem written by a famous English poet, Lord Alfred Tennyson, describing flowers:

*Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower -but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.*

This poet represents the method to learn nature. However, human beings bring and use natural products from their resources without being respectful. They study natural resources as they are the masters who rule over rather than being a part of nature. This is the needed attitude. We took advantage and erred; now is the time to release control and conserve and develop nature. This would be the correct or Buddhist right-view. Every religious system preaches adherents to not be too greedy and exploit or take advantage over nature. Humanity should learn to utilize nature properly, have gratitude, and conserve nature.

The Buddha taught gratitude, or the thanking for benefits received or reciprocated from nature. Anyone can claim benefits from destroying nature and betray equilibrium in nature and deny the Buddha's teaching:

*To sit or sleep under shade of a tree  
It is disallowed to cut its branch.  
Anyone doing harm to trees, he is truly wicked.*

### *The Buddha and Nature:*

The Buddha spent his life closely relating to the natural environment. He was born, became enlightened, and died in forest-groves. His birth place was in Lumbini Grove. His Supreme Enlightenment by comprehending all was under a Bodhi Tree. He died beneath a pair of Sāla Trees. When Siddhattha renounced the world, he retired and cultivated his attainments inside the forests. One area became Veluvana - or the Monastery of Bamboo. This forest monastery later became Jetavana Mahāvihāra - the location where the Buddha had spent a large portion of his teaching career, some nineteen rainy seasons.

The Buddha was interested in nature all of his life. Another event occurred before the Buddha went to his hometown – Kapilavatthu. His father, King Suddhodana sent for his son nine times through a representative – each of which in turn, listened to the Buddha teachings



and becoming so impressed, entered the monkhood. They forgot to invite the Buddha to Kapilavatthu to minister to his father. The ninth time, however, Kāludāyī, the most trustworthy minister, was able to invite the Buddha to preach his father, King Suddhodana – taking good responsibility to the king’s order; however, he too entered the monkhood.

Kāludāyī realized that the Buddha loved nature, so he spoke fondly, in 64 verses to describe the beautiful scenery along the way to his father’s Kingdom: the many beautiful flowers and lovely wild animals, and more. The 64 verses described nature beautifully to impress upon the Buddha’s memory. When Kāludāyī had finished his verses, he was asked by the Buddha why he versed the descriptions. Thus, Kāludāyī took the good opportunity to invite the Buddha to teach Buddhism in Kapilavatthu – finally the Buddha accepted the invitation.





## *Jātaka and Its Lessons to Learn to Love Nature:*

Jātaka or past-life stories teach us to love nature. In many of these lives, stories were very illustrative of the relationships between animals and plant species. These stories are often manipulated to instruct children to love nature – highlighting the importance of animals and plants. Children are better at determining that human-beings and animals are similar. In stories, humans and animals communicate in the same language. Children see animals as their friends. Through



this mechanism, we educate and provide the love for nature into children's minds. The Buddha used birth-stories as a tool to teach dhamma in various ways to fellows for gaining respect, love and gratitude towards nature; so it can be concluded that many of the 547 Jātakas are valuable and useful towards environmental education. In one such story:

There were 500 hermits who live in a forest. On some occasion, the forest became arid. Animals did not have enough water to drink and use. One clever, kind, and helpful hermit cut a tree and used it as the water trough and poured water into it. Animals drank water at the trough. A hermit did not have time to find food from being busy serving water. All the animals discussed the situation: "The kind hermit is starving and becoming very skinny, so we would like to be grateful to the hermit for his kindness; therefore the animals that drink water here must carry fruits to give to the hermit." The animals, then, when approaching to drink water, would also bring fruits for the hermits. Thus, there was enough food for 500 hermits.

Humans and nature are relatives, interdependent and interconnected, and nothing is absolute or independent. When humanity benefits from nature, they should also replace what was taken, so there will be more in the future. Humans need to engage in preservation methods - anyone destroying nature can be said to be destroying humanity – betraying society.



A long time ago, merchants traveled to trade in another city. They passed an arid region without food and water. Fortunately, they saw a big tree. The trees' branch was cut to get water flowing from its branches. The merchants survived by drinking water and later picked some fruits from the other side of the big tree. The merchants felt greedy, so they discussed further what they would do with the tree. The leader of the merchant-group, however, disagreed and tried to warn them. It was a pity that nobody listened to their leader - the big tree was cut, and immediately, Nāga came out and killed all of the merchants except the merchant-leader. This story demonstrates the following lesson: to sit or to sleep under the shade of tree is ok; but no one should cut or destroy the branches. Anyone destroying the tree, he is wicked and foolish.





## *Learning from Nature:*

Trees provide beautiful flowers, green leaves, and peaceful shade, and fruit. They are very helpful. When they are cut by human beings, it means they hurt their best friends.

The life of Buddha was mostly spent in the forests. He became enlightened while meditating beneath a great Bodhi Tree. The Buddha stood for one week gazing at the same Bodhi tree. The Buddha demonstrated his gratitude and appreciation to the tree that had sheltered and nurtured him. The Buddha always taught followers to realize the value of nature and live in harmony with

nature. The Buddha used the natural environment as curriculum because nature served many examples or illustrations for dhamma-lessons. Nature is honest, not deceptive - the truth is quickly noticed; for example, green leaves turn to yellow leaves and later fall down. However, currently, people find it difficult to notice nature and learn uncertainty or change because they live in urban area-residences that are comfortable and far removed from nature. It is a pity, humanity lacks the chance to witness non-ego, impermanence, and suffering. When humanity comprehends or is able to access nature, insights into the Dhamma is gained - Buddhist teachings become instantaneously recognizable. There is an obvious Zen story: A grandmother stated:

*When I started studying Zen and I looked at the mountain - it was not the mountain which I normally got used to. When I looked at the river, it was not the river as I had ever seen. After I had finished my study and got to understand Zen - I looked at the mountain, it was a normal mountain. I looked at the river, it was a normal river.*

Nowadays, Thai Buddhist monks teach efficiency to the foreign Buddhist monks. The perfect case study was Phra Bodhiñāna Thera or Luang Phor Chah who was the abbot of a forest monastery at Wat Nong Pah



Pong, where many foreign monks reside. When foreign monks are asked how to learn Buddhist teachings, they answer that it is just the simple methodology of teachings pertaining to natural occurrences or materials such as uncertainty or the seasonal-changing of trees around the temple for teaching *aniccatā* (impermanence), *dukkhatā* (suffering or painfulness), and *anattatā* (non-ego). Thus, foreign monks understand common characteristics or names of objects because they knew the local environment and trees, easily and very well. However, if Luang Phor Chah taught and gave the example of Banaras or Thai society, some difficulties may arise from cultural differences that could prevent the acquisition of knowledge. Thus, utilizing nature is a form of universal language – using nature we can effectively communicate across many barriers. Nature is nature everywhere, and it is the real truth that can be universally comprehended. From the aspect of religions, natural environment is valuable to bring people to the real and ultimate truth. Buddhists use natural environment to teach the cause-and-effect law of *the Dependent Origination*.

The Buddha realized the helpfulness of nature: he provides the teachings for us to be grateful and to conserve nature. He also enacted the monastic regulations, making forbidden: killing living beings, cutting trees, digging the ground or releasing the waste into rivers or reservoirs. The Buddha encouraged monks to travel during most of



the year and live in the forests, or in one location during the rainy-season to preserve new growth.

For the layman, the Buddha enacted regulations forbidding killing living-being as the first of five precepts which requires adherents to abstain from engaging in violence. The Buddha taught in the Vinaya Pitaka which is the collection of monastery rules laid down by the Buddha for the four assemblies: (monks, nuns and laypeople).

*“They who plant orchards, who plant groves, who build bridges, who set up sheds by the roadside with drinking water for the travelers, who sink wells or build reservoirs, who put up various forms of shelter for the public, are those in whom merit grows by day and by night.”* He also taught *loving-kindness* which referred to love and feeling sympathetic towards all living beings.





## *Religions and the Proving Lessons to Learn to Love*



Love and harmless are taught and exist in every religion. For example, in Christianity, Jesus was asked to conclude an enactment. His answer was: love means the love towards God and humanity. Jesus preached to the followers about love and peace: “to one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also”. Islam is another peaceful religion. Hinduism teaches the non-violence through references towards non-harm. There is an important sermon in the Vedas: “*Thou are that*” (Tat tvam asi). Brahman is knowledge. The self (or the Soul) is Brahman. I am Brahman. Thou are that. All this that we see in the world is Brahman. Brahman is existence, consciousness, and bliss. As we concur: love and non-violence are important and existent in every religion.

If religious adherents and general-common society gain greater insights into their own religious heritage, they will love living-beings and refrain from harming natural surroundings. Religious organizations have the sacred duty to teach and suggest humanity must change thought-paradigms and ways of life – transforming from “master” to “guardian”. Humanity must not exploit or take advantage of nature; humanity must conserve and diversely develop the progression of nature. Science and





technology must suitably develop in order to be non-harmful. We hope to see this sustainable development in our lifetime. Sustainable development will occur when the natural environment is unharmed. We need to balanced development across three factors: humane humanity, science and technology, and our environment.

