



Thoughts from  
Brahma Kumaris

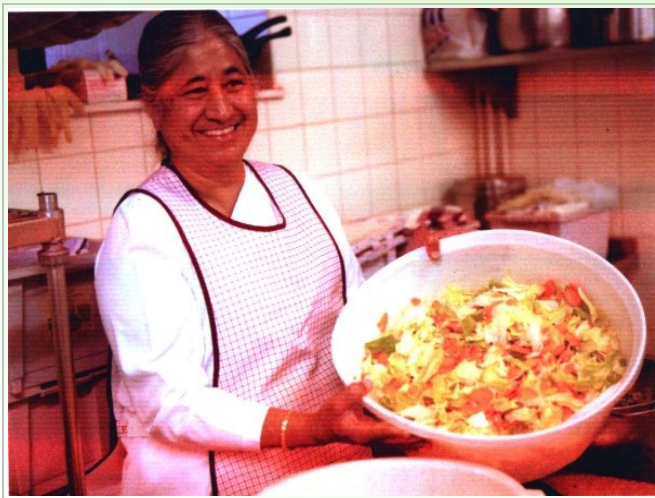
## 1. The Environment

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Our environment is unquestionably changing. The energy from the sun and the activities of human beings are having a direct influence on the earth, the weather and the natural calamities we experience. Little by little humanity continues to deplete the earth's natural assets. If we were to make a distinction between our needs and our wants, the earth would provide enough resources for everyone.

## 2. Vegetarian Lifestyle

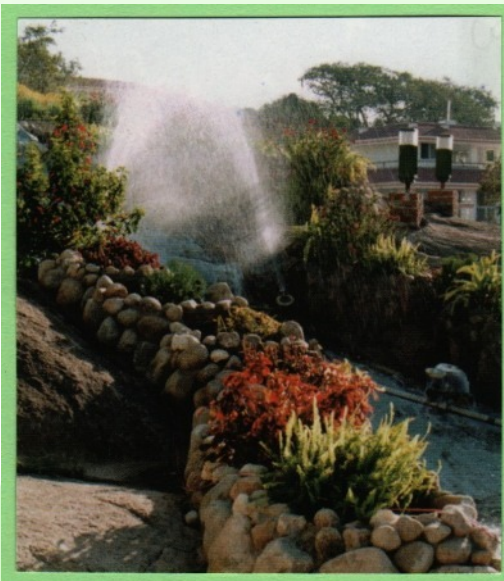
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The Brahma Kumaris encourage the respect of nature and of all life. The regular Raja Yoga students adopt a vegetarian lifestyle which is more conducive to achieving total peace of mind.

### 3. Preserving the Natural Environment

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The international headquarters of the BKWSU is situated in Rajasthan, India. The Academy for a Better World is an example of environmentally friendly construction. In the design of the whole complex, a commitment was made to integrate all buildings as much as possible within the natural environment by maintaining the existing topography, preserving rock formations and leaving plenty of open space for gardens, trees, lakes and broad access ways.

## 4. Renewable Energy

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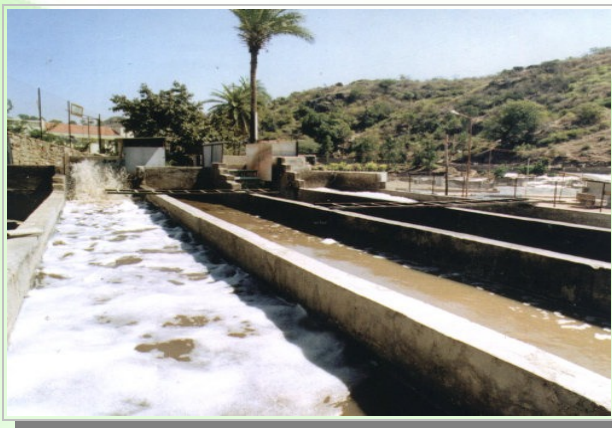
### Solar Powered Kitchens



The academy regularly offers three full meals a day to at least a thousand people or more (up to 20,000 people at a time visit the university compounds). This makes the energy requirements of the extensive kitchens an obvious priority. Parabolic mirrors and solar panels offer the most eco-friendly and economical way of powering them.

### Waste Water Treatment

To minimise pollution and maximise water resources, a sewage treatment plant has been installed at the



university's headquarters. The plant has the capacity to treat about two hundred thousand litres of waste water a day and to make nearly eighty percent of this available for re-use.



Thoughts from  
Judaism

## 1. General

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An ancient Jewish teaching (midrash) relates:



When the Holy one, blessed be He, created the first person, God showed him the trees in the Garden of Eden, and said to him: "See My works, how fine they are; Now all that I have created, I created for your benefit. Think upon this and do not corrupt and destroy My world, For if you destroy it, there is no one to restore it after you."

*Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:28*

In Jewish law and tradition, there are a considerable number of sources referring to what are now called 'environmental' issues. Jewish Tradition talks about "Tikun Olam" (Repairing the World) – it is the task of every person to do what they can to improve the world, even if you personally can only do the smallest amount.

"It is not your duty to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it."

*Rabbi Tarphon, Avot 2:16*

## 2. Prevention of Destruction

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The prevention of wanton destruction (*Bal tashkhit*), is the halachic principle that explains Judaism's attitude toward the environment.

"When in your war against a city you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down"

*The Torah - The Old Testament*

The rabbis have extended this principle to apply at all times in our "disposable society", and to apply to almost any form of needless waste of resources. This includes not using more food, fuel, paper, money or any other resource than necessary for our needs - to accomplish what the Creator put us here to do.

While forces in our modern society attempt to link a person's success and happiness with the amount of resources they consume, our tradition teaches that spiritually elevated people don't waste.

"This is the way of the pious and elevated people ...they will not waste even a mustard seed, and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage they see, and if they are able to save, they will save anything from destruction with all of their power...Every person is obligated to master his inclinations and conquer his desires"

*Sefer HaChinuch*

### 3. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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Many Jewish laws refer to the prevention of cruelty to animals (*tzar ba'alei chaim*).

The Torah tells us, for instance, that

we must not eat the limb of a living animal. Neither may we plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together. This would obviously be unfair to the weaker animal. On Shabbat, not only should we rest, but also our animals. The Talmud tells us that it is forbidden for man to eat before feeding his animals.

*"The only hunters mentioned in the Torah are Nimrod and Esau..... How can a Jew go to kill a living creature only with the purpose of hunting for pleasure?"*

*R. Yehezkel Landau*

Numerous other laws seek to limit animal suffering. Examples include prohibiting any animal from the herd or from the flock being slaughtered on the same day as its young and prevention of taking fledglings or eggs from a bird's nest together with the mother.

## 4. Preservation of Natural Resources

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Many laws relate to preservation of natural resources. An example concerns concerns land policies and soil protection. The law of *shemitta*, the sabbatical year, commands us to let the land rest and lie

fallow in the seventh year. After each 49 years, a jubilee year should be declared. During this jubilee, the same prohibitions are applied with regard to working the land as in the sabbatical year.

There are many references in the Torah stories to the preservation of resources. Abraham and Lot separate in order not to overwork the land. The gold used in the Temple instruments is recycled. There should be no scorched earth policies in Jewish wars.

In the Midrash we are told many times about the necessity of planting trees, while conspicuous consumption is discouraged.



## 5. Nuisance and pollution

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In Jewish thinking, nuisance and pollution limitation and health protection play an important role. Nuisance and pollution are viewed very negatively. They are tools of punishment. This concept dominates the story of the Ten Plagues, but the fall of Jericho is also brought about by what we would nowadays call 'excess noise pollution'.

The thinking translates to a range of very practical laws such as the one below seen in the Talmud governing living conditions in ancient Jerusalem:

"One should not erect a dung-heap there. One should not build a kiln there, one should not establish vegetable and fruit gardens, with the exception of the rose garden which has been there since the time of the first prophets. One should not raise chickens there. One should not leave a corpse there overnight."

*The Talmud*

## 6. The allocation of space

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Another element of environmental concern is the allocation of space. The main example in Halakha is that of the Levite cities and the cities of refuge. Two thousand cubits outside the town, on each side, had to be open space which were to be used as pasture. It was forbidden to build houses, plant vineyards or till fields there.

This approach is a precursor of modern town-planning attitudes, which try to apply strict ratios between built-up and open spaces.

## 6. Preserving the species

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There is another important element in Jewish law which refers to nature: the laws of *kilayim*, protecting the constancy of species. This, along with other laws, point to the overriding need for us to protect nature.



"You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material."

*The Torah*

## 7. Lessons for today

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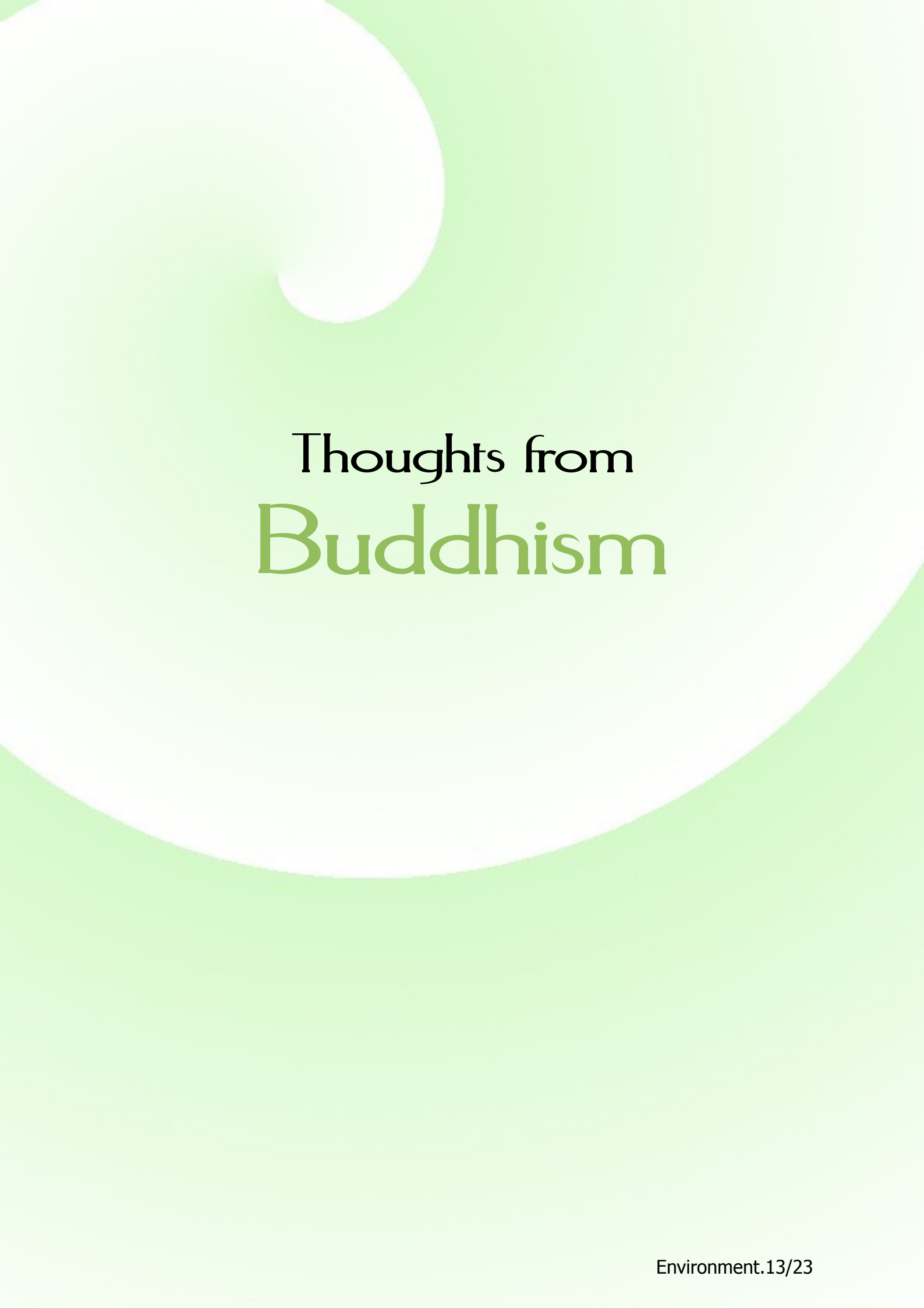
Jewish laws and customs passed down for thousands of years are as relevant today as ever:



1. Judaism teaches that the earth is the Lord's and that we are to be partners and co-workers with God in protecting the environment. This contrasts strongly with today's philosophy that the earth is to be exploited for maximum profit, regardless of the long-range ecological consequences.

2. Judaism stresses *Bal Tashchit*, that we are not to waste or unnecessarily destroy anything of value. This shines an unflattering light on wastefulness in the West so great that, with less than 5% of the world's people, we use about a third of the world's resources.

3. Judaism asserts that each of us should consider the long-range consequences of our actions and that we must plan for future generations; the way of the world today, with its emphasis on immediate gains, is simply not sustainable.



Thoughts from  
**Buddhism**

# 1. Our Connection with the Environment

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*Photo courtesy SGI-UK Archive*

“Buddhism considers the health of our ecology to be of prime importance, and seeks ways to sustain a harmonious relationship with it.”

“Buddhism teaches that our own lives are inseparable from our environment. Inseparability means that we are influenced or supported by our environment, and we can in turn influence or support our environment.”

It is easy to see how the environment affects our lives – for instance our bodies are sustained by food, water, air and warmth. At the same time, our spirits are influenced by the environment. They may lift on a beautiful day, or when spending time with friends or when doing something creative. We can also see how our own lives affect the environment. As we know, every year more of the environment is threatened, and we have even begun to destroy our atmosphere.

Our connection with the environment is very deep. Buddhism teaches that our environment is actually a reflection of our life-state, and in the same way, the state of the earth is a reflection of the collective life-state of all people on the planet.

## 2. Pollution of the Life State

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“The purpose of Buddhism is to raise the life state of all people – to enable people to become happy. Happiness comes from transforming greed, anger and foolishness or ignorance to compassion, courage and wisdom and living creative lives in rhythm with the life of the universe.”

In today's world, much human behaviour is driven by what Buddhism calls the three poisons: greed, anger and foolishness. They are called 'poisons' because they pollute people's lives and work to prevent them from turning their hearts and minds to goodness.

- The poison of greed causes us to grab all we can now, and want more, without thinking about the plight of future generations. Taken to extremes, it leads to famine. Through Buddhist practice, we transform greed into **compassion**.
- Anger is the poison from which conflict or war arises. The insecurity of the self leads to a need to control and dominate. However, no amount of domination can ever control everything, hence the insecurity continues. War, which always leads to loss of life and destruction of the environment, does not solve the problems of insecurity and anger. Through Buddhist practice, we transform anger into the **courage** needed to find creative, peaceful solutions to conflict situations.
- Foolishness or ignorance means that we do not recognise that all life (including our own) has Buddha nature, and is worthy of respect. 'Foolish' behaviour – abusing one's own life, or not caring about others' lives or the life of the environment – leads to disease. Through Buddhist practice, we transform foolishness into **wisdom**.

### 3. For a better environment

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If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?

*The writings of Nichiren Daichonin*

People who base themselves on the life-state of Buddha live with the awareness of oneness with the environment. They work to protect and nurture their own life and life around them. They live a life dedicated to helping others and protecting the environment.

In this way, a fundamental change for the better in the environment starts with a fundamental change for the better in our own lives.

# Thoughts from Islam

# 1. The Environment

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Islam teaches that Allah (God) has created everything in this universe in due proportion and measure both quantitatively and qualitatively. Muslims believe that their Sacred Book, the Quran, consists of the spoken word of Allah. Allah says in the Quran:

“Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days, and then He Istawa (rose over) the Throne. He brings the night as a cover over the day, seeking it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, the stars subjected to His Command. Surely, His is the Creation and Commandment. Blessed be Allah, the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn, and all that exists) .”  
*Al-A'raf 7:54*

Each thing that Allah has created is a wondrous sign, full of meaning. Allah has not created anything in this universe in vain, without wisdom, value and purpose. Allah says:

“And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, for mere play. We created them not except with truth (i.e. to examine and test those who are obedient and those who are disobedient), but most of them know not.”  
*Quran 44:38-39*

Man is part of this universe, the elements of which are complementary to one another in an integrated way. Indeed, man is a distinct part of the universe and has a special position among its other parts, a relationship of:

- meditation, consideration, and contemplation of the universe and what it contains.
- sustainable utilization, development, and employment for man's benefit and for the fulfilment of his interests.
- care and nurture for man's good works are not limited to the benefit of the human species:

“There is a reward in doing good to every living thing.”  
*(Saheeh Al-Bukhari)*

## 2. Conservation of Basic Natural Resources

Allah has made it clear in the Quran that each thing and every creature in the universe, whether known to man or not, performs two major functions: a religious function in so far as it evidences the Maker's presence and infinite Wisdom, Power, and Grace; and a social function in the service of man and other created beings.



God's wisdom has ordained that His creatures shall be of service to one another. The divinely appointed measurement and distribution of all elements and creatures, each performing its ordained role and all of them valuable, makes up the dynamic balance by which the creation is maintained. Over exploitation, abuse, misuse, destruction, and pollution of natural resources are all transgressions against the divine scheme.

However, self-interest is always likely to tempt mankind to disrupt the dynamic equilibrium set by God, the protection of all natural resources from abuse is a mandatory duty. Quoted in the Quran, Satan, who epitomises transgression and evil in the Islamic belief, says to God:

*"Verily I will mislead them, and surely I will arouse in them false desires; and certainly I will order them to slit the ears of cattle, and indeed I will order them to change the nature created by Allah..."*

*(An-Nisa 4:119).*

### 3. Conservation of Water

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Allah has made water the basis and origin of life. Plants, animals, and man all depend on water for their existence and for the continuation of their lives. Allah has called on man to appreciate the value of this essential source of life. Allah says:



*“Have you seen the water which you drink? Was it you who sent it down from the rain cloud, or did We send it? Were it Our will, We could have made it bitter; why then do you not give thanks?”*  
*(Quran 56:68-70)*

In addition to this vital function, water is provided to purify the body and clothing from all dirt, impurities and defilement so that man may encounter God clean and pure.

*“...And He caused rain to descend on you from heaven to cleanse you therewith...”*  
*(Quran 8:11)*

Allah has made water the habitat of many created beings, which play vital roles in the perpetuation of life and the development of this world. Conservation of this vital element is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life in its various forms; plant, animal, and human. In Islamic law, whatever is indispensable to fulfil the imperative obligation of preserving life is itself obligatory.

Any action that obstructs or impairs the biological and social functions of this element, whether by destroying it or by polluting it with any substance that would make it an unsuitable environment for living things; any such action necessarily leads to the impairment or ruin of life itself:

*“What leads to the prohibited is itself prohibited.”*

## 4. Conservation of Air

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Nearly all terrestrial creatures are utterly dependent on the air they breathe. The air also has other functions, as we have been made aware of by the Glorious Quran, such as the vitally important role of the winds in pollination. Allah has said:

*“And He it is Who sends the winds as tidings heralding His grace: until when they have raised a heavy-laden cloud, We drive it to a dead land and cause the rain to descend upon it, and thereby bring forth fruits of every kind.”*

*(Quran 7:57)*

The atmosphere's conservation, pure and unpolluted, is an essential aspect of the conservation of life itself, which is one of the fundamental objectives of Islamic law.

## 5. Conservation of Land

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God has made the land a source of sustenance and livelihood for us and other living creatures. He has made the soil fertile and the mountains to catch and store the rain and to stabilize the crust of the earth, as He has shown us in the Glorious Quran:

*“And the earth, after that He has spread it out, from it He has brought forth its waters and its pastures, and He has made fast the mountains, a provision for you and for your cattle.”*

*Quran 79:30-33*

Muslims are required to maintain the productivity of the soil, and not expose it to erosion by wind and flood; in building, farming, grazing, forestry, and mining, we are required to follow practices which do not bring about its degradation but preserve and enhance its fertility.

## 6. Conservation of Plants and Animals

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There is no denying the importance of plants and animals as living resources of enormous benefit, without which neither man nor other species could survive. God has not made any of His creatures worthless; every single form of life is the product of a special and intricate development by God, and each warrants special respect. Allah has said:

*“Then let man consider his nourishment: that We pour down the rain in showers, and We split the earth in fragments, and therein make the grain to grow, and vines and herbs, and olives and palms, and gardens of dense foliage, and fruits and fodder - provision for you and your cattle.”*

*(Quran 80:24-32)*

Animals provide sustenance for plants, for one another, and for man. Their dung and their bodies enrich the soil and the seas. They contribute to the atmosphere by respiration and by their movements and migrations contribute to the distribution of plants. They provide mankind with leather, hair and wool, medicines and perfumes, and means of conveyance, as well as meat, milk, and honey. God has declared in the Glorious Quran:

*“There is not an animal on the earth, nor any being that wings its flight, but is a people like unto you...”*

*(Quran 6:38)*

The Prophet Muhammad forbade that a fire be lit upon an anthill, and related that an ant once stung one of the prophets, who then ordered that the whole colony of ants be burned. God revealed to him in rebuke:

*“Because an ant stung you, you have destroyed a whole nation that celebrates Allah’s glory.”*

*(Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)*

## 7. Protection of Man and Environment

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Muslims believe that prevention of damage and corruption before it occurs is better than later treatment. An important juristic rule in Islamic Law (Shariah) states,

**“The averting of harm takes precedence over the acquisition of benefits.”**

Accordingly, all activities which aim at achieving good and securing benefits by way of satisfying human needs, providing services and developing agriculture, industry, and means of communication should be carried out without causing significant damage, injury, or corruption.

Waste products and exhaust fumes, resulting from human or industrial activities should be carefully disposed of or eliminated in order to protect the environment against corruption and distortion. The most selective and least destructive means of pest control are required by these values and principles of Islam. Their application should be carefully calculated to protect human life, crops, and livestock with utmost efficiency and effectiveness, and with an eye to make the minimum overall impact on God’s creation.

Intoxicants and narcotics have a harmful effect on the physical, mental, social and psychological health of human beings and, as a consequence, on his life and reason; his offspring, work, properties, honour, and righteousness. Therefore, all kinds of intoxicants and mind-affecting drugs have been prohibited in Islam. Their production and marketing as well as of anything that is associated with them or assists in their production is forbidden. This shows the concern of Islamic legislation for over fourteen centuries for the protection of human life and the conservation of the social and physical environment against all forms of corruption, harm, damage and pollution.