

## LESSON 16: A World Degraded



### REFERENCE

Page 379 [EXPOSURE & AWARENESS]  
and Page 383 [ACTION & SERVICE -  
Work for Change]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (1) LSM: 'Psalm 104'
- (2) TSM: 'The Earth Charter?'  
(2)(3)(4) LSM: 'People on the Move'

### AIM

- To introduce the learners to major factors contributing to the degradation of the natural and human environment

### OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners consider certain patterns of behaviour that are widespread in the world today.
- SKL Learners apply the information to their own lives.
- DAP Learners identify choices they could make in countering the prevailing patterns.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

Many of the concepts introduced in the texts provided for this lesson will be new to the learners. One of your aims is to secure these concepts for refinement in the higher grades. It is important for the learners to recognise that patterns in their own lives are in fact widespread and that these contribute to the degradation of the environment. People are often coerced into conforming to these patterns by political and economic structures.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### 1 Introduction

Introduce the lesson by reminding the learners of important features of Psalm 104. The text given below provides ideas for the content of this introduction.

*Psalm 104 gave us a bird's-eye view of the magnificence of God's creation and the honoured place of human beings in it. The second account of creation in the Book of Genesis (Gen 2: 4b-25) reminds us that human beings became part of a vast tapestry of life that already existed; it was their task to become integrated into it. The difference was that whereas nature responds to in-built laws of nature, human beings are given the power to conduct their lives in an intelligent and conscious way; they are given the freedom to make choices. By working together, all living things should be able to enjoy the abundance with which God had blessed them.*

#### 2 The Earth Charter

Distribute the Lesson Materials page 'People on the Move'. Read through the section 'Earth Charter' with the learners after giving them a very short introduction to the Charter. You will find a detailed description of the charter in the Lesson Materials page 'The Earth Charter'.

Briefly consider the following questions:

- Do you think *The Earth Charter* gives an accurate view of the situation in the world today? What evidence do you have of this?

## GRADE 8 Structural Morality

- *The Earth Charter* states that “the protection of the Earth’s vitality, diversity and beauty is a sacred trust.” You will soon be thinking of your future career. Which careers could you consider in order to respond to this “sacred trust”?

The careers suggested by the class may be summarised on the board in the form of a mind-map. Expand this as necessary.

### 3 People on the Move

Read through the points with the learners. The questions can be discussed with the class as a whole but provision has also been made on the Lesson Materials page ‘People on the Move’ for the learners to write down their own personal responses.

### 4 Conclusion

The learners complete their answers to the questions on the Lesson Materials page. Should there not be enough time for this, consider giving it to them for homework

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## OTHER IDEAS

### 5 Chief Seattle

CORD p 381-2 contains a transcript of the famous speech of Chief Seattle to the President of the United States of America. As an alternative to the above lesson, you might like to use the text as a comprehension exercise. A brief explanation of the occasion of this speech is given on p 380.

#### PART 1: Understanding the Text

- Explain why Chief Seattle wrote this letter to the US President. Note both (i) the occasion for the letter, and (ii) the concern he wished to express.
- What incident does the Chief describe to show that his fears are well-founded?
- Chief Seattle constantly draws a distinction between 'the ways of the red man' and 'the ways of the white man'. (i) List several of these contrasting points on a table drawn into your answer sheet. (ii) Sum up the differences between these in your own words.
- (i) Do you know how Chief Seattle's fears came to be realised? (ii) What was lost?
- In his letter, Chief Seattle talks of the 'white man' as 'civilised' and the 'red man' as savage. Can you explain the irony in this?
- Suggest how the extermination of the plains buffalo by hunters can be seen as a violation of the human rights of American Indians.

#### PART 2: Responding to the Text

- How did you feel when you first read the passage? How do you feel now that you've discussed the text?
- Can you provide examples of resource depletion in our South African context?
- Can you see any other points of comparison between the letter and South African history?
- Can you link examples of resource depletion in the South African context to a violation of human rights?
- The South African Constitution speaks of socio-economic rights. And a large international debate concerns whether communities can be vested with rights. (At present human rights are vested in each individual – at least ideally.) What do you think of these two ideas? Can you link them to government programmes such as social welfare, health, housing, and land redistribution?

## **6 How Do We Create Community?**

Look at paragraphs 3 and 4 on the Lesson Materials page 'People On The Move'. Here, the loss of a sense of belonging to a community is described as an effect of moving. But when we enter into new situations, we also (whether instinctively or consciously) set out to join to create a community.

- i. Recall your experience of your first day of school – either primary or high? How did you feel? What enabled you to feel at home? Or when did you come to feel at home? How did you (the teacher, school, your classmates, yourself) engage in community-building?
- ii. Consider how you have changed as a result of your experience of school. Can you identify values, attitudes, or behaviours you have 'learnt' or developed as a way of (mostly) getting along with (mostly) everyone?
- iii. SA has come out of a history of oppression; and still faces deep race, class, and gender divides. Is there anything in your experience of school that holds true for the larger task of nation-building?

### **MATERIALS**

#### **TEACHER**

- The Earth Charter. [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) (abridged)

#### **LEARNER**

- The Earth Charter - excerpts from the Preamble
- CIE. 2005. 'People on the Move'



## Lesson Materials

### Psalm 104

O Lord, how great and all-powerful You are!  
And how beautiful is the world You created  
for our habitation!  
Even before we were brought forth from the dust,  
You prepared a place for us  
in which to live and grow.  
And everything we saw  
reflected the beauty and power  
of the living God.

There was clean air.  
Pure water from snow-capped mountains  
flowed through green valleys  
and gathered together to become great lakes.  
The skies shone with a million lights.  
The land brought forth flowers and fruits  
to delight the eye and palate of God's creatures.  
And every part of the land  
and the waters that covered the land  
and the skies that looked down on the land  
were filled with uncountable forms of life;  
the world was vibrant and alive.

Your power and Your beauty were spread  
throughout the universe  
but it was only upon the hearts of men and women  
that you imprinted your image.  
And these creatures,  
in their short stay upon this world,  
were destined to be Your co-workers  
in the ever-continuing process of creation.  
Your creative activity has never ceased.  
It continues in and through the life  
of your creatures.  
Limited and fallible as we are,  
Our minds and hands are assigned  
to corral Your life-giving energies  
and to direct them in controlling  
and replenishing the earth  
that life may be given and sustained  
throughout the world.

O Lord, how great and powerful You are!  
And how beautiful is the world you created  
for our habitation.

## Lesson Materials



# People on the Move

## THE EARTH CHARTER

*The Earth Charter* came into being as a result of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It was finalised in 1997. This document outlines serious problems existing in the environment today and suggests ways of dealing with them. Among other things, it deals with the economic, social and political conditions needed for sustainable development. One of its opening paragraphs paints a grim picture of the consequences of choices that human beings have made:

*The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared fairly and the gap between the rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering ...*


The Charter also reflects on what our responsibilities are:

*Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.*

Taken from *The Earth Charter – Preamble*

Author Elaine Prevallet (*In the Service of Life*) identifies several reasons for our disregard for the natural environment. One of these is that people are constantly moving.

- 1 Because of the need to find paid employment, many people choose to go to large towns and cities. In doing this, they lose their connection to the land and so no longer have a commitment to the preservation of the natural environment.
- 2 In South Africa, many poor people from the countryside move into the cities. They often have to find accommodation in slum areas that have no facilities such as water, sewerage, refuse removal and electricity. Some move into flats and these quickly deteriorate.

**Lesson Materials**  *PEOPLE ON THE MOVE (cont)*

*Suggest two reasons why these people don't do anything to improve their living conditions in the cities.*

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*What is the general effect on the environment?*

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*In the past, many people in South Africa were forced to move from one place to another. Who compelled them to move?*

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*The reasons given for these forced removals were often different from the real reasons. What do you think the real reasons were?*

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*People in other countries in Africa are also forced to move frequently. What is the main reason for this? What will happen to the environment if this continues?*

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Lesson Materials



PEOPLE ON THE MOVE (cont)

- 3 By moving so often, people are losing their sense of belonging to a community. When children grow up, they often leave home to go to places where they have no family connections. Cut off from responsibilities to others who depend on them, they become concerned only with what is best for themselves; they no longer participate in the community of all living things. They become consumers of manufactured products without feeling any obligation to conserve and restore the resources on which these products depend.
  
- 4 Children learn their values in their homes. These values are supported by the religion to which they belong. All religions teach us how to be people of integrity and honour, how we should relate to God, to each other, and to the material creation. But the faith in which we were brought up is the one that most reflects the values of our family; it is the one that God gave us to guide us through life, the one that gives us spiritual identity. Individuals who have no ties to land, to families and to faith communities are less likely to have strongly formed values of their own.
  
- 5 In leaving home for distant places then, people lose their ties with the Earth, with their families and with their basic value systems. They lose their identity as persons who come from a certain place, who belong to a certain family, and who uphold certain values in relating to God, to others and to the Earth. The result is that they feel no responsibility for the decline in the quality of life being experienced by people and nature and they feel very resentful when they are called on to be accountable for the choices they make in support of their own selfish interests.

*✍ What are your plans for your future? Do you plan to settle down close to your family where you can put your energy in improving the quality of life where you live, or do you dream of going away to a different environment where you will have fewer responsibilities for those who have given you life?*

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*✍ What makes you **want** to stay/leave? What would have to happen to make you want to stay? Can you do anything to make this happen?*

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## Lesson Materials



# The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is an authoritative synthesis of values, principles, and aspirations that are widely shared by growing numbers of men and women in all regions of the world. The principles of the Earth Charter reflect extensive international consultations conducted over a period of many years. These principles are also based upon contemporary science, international law, and the insights of philosophy and religion. Successive drafts of the Earth Charter were circulated around the world for comments and debate by nongovernmental organisations, community groups, professional societies, and international experts in many fields.

### **PREAMBLE**

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognise that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

### **EARTH, OUR HOME**

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

### **THE GLOBAL SITUATION**

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

The Challenges Ahead/...



*Lesson Materials*   
THE EARTH CHARTER (cont)

## **THE CHALLENGES AHEAD**

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

## **UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY**

To realise these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organisations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

## **PRINCIPLES**

### **I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE**

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

### II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY/...

*Lesson Materials*  
THE EARTH CHARTER (cont)

**II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY**

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

**III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

**IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE**

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

© The Earth Charter. [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) (abridged)

## LESSON 17: A Simple Lifestyle



REFERENCE

Page 383 [ACTION & SERVICE - Relief Work]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (3) LSM: 'Adopting a Simple Lifestyle'
- (4) LSM: 'Ideas for You to Think About'

### AIM

- To make the learners aware that many people (themselves included) live at a higher standard of living than necessary, and that simplifying one's lifestyle is a moral imperative in order to conserve the resources of the earth, and to ensure a more equitable distribution thereof.

### OUTCOMES

- SKL Learners apply prior knowledge to their own circumstances..
- DAP Learners consider the spiritual and material benefits of adopting a simpler lifestyle.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

Learners in Grade 8 have no control over social structures that influence the national economy. However, they *do* have some power of influence over the circumstances in their own homes, especially in regard to the preservation of the Earth's resources.

There are two major issues that cause problems in the world today - the misuse of economic power and the misuse of political power. These problems arise because of 'vested interests', the effort made by certain countries to secure all the advantages of wealth and power for themselves. For example, oil is a very valuable commodity because it is an important source of energy for countries that have advanced technologies. These countries put political and economic pressure on oil-producing countries to sell their product at low prices. They may find reasons to go to war with them or to impose economic sanctions against them. In other words, they have a 'vested interest' in getting the best deal for themselves irrespective of whether this prevents the other countries from making progress or depletes the resources of their natural environment.

There are two major outcomes of economic greed. No matter how much money people have, they always want more so that they can buy all the things that bring them comfort and that make them feel secure. The second outcome is that in order to have more of such things, they have to take more from the earth. They hardly ever think of how the resources of the earth will be replaced.

You, the teacher, need to inculcate habits of thrift by modeling them in your own life, by taking care of classroom resources, by enforcing environment-friendly rules on the school premises (for example correct disposal of litter, sparing use of water and electricity, prohibition of vandalism), and by encouraging learners to transfer what they learn in school to their own living conditions at home. When children are made responsible for the care of plants and animals, they are drawn into the web of life in a humanising way.

The first Lesson Materials page 'Adopting a Simple Lifestyle' invites the learners to take stock of some of practices in their own homes. The second, 'Ideas for You to Think About', will need

more input. Many young teenagers are still at the 'conformist' level of faith development and have not yet made a personal choice of religious or spiritual values. They may have some difficulty in identifying and understanding the spiritual benefits of adopting a simple lifestyle.

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## **LESSON OUTLINE**

### **1 Introduction**

What follows provides the teacher with ideas as to how to link this lesson with the previous one.

In Lesson 2 of this Unit, learners were introduced briefly to the Earth Charter. The Charter holds that economic justice is essential if we are to preserve the resources of the earth. Besides promoting the health of natural resources such as air, water, plants and animals, we need to pay attention to the way in which we produce and use the things we buy. Generally speaking, we make and use far more than we need. By over-consuming, we deplete the earth's resources; by demanding the lowest prices, we take advantage of people who have to work for low wages.

Invite an initial discussion, inviting learners to respond to the following statements:

- We make and use far more than we need.
- We deplete the earth's resources.
- We take advantage of people who have to work for low wages.

### **2 The Earth Charter**

Present the following suggestions made in the Charter as to how we can play our part in conserving the resources of the earth:

- Reduce, reuse and recycle materials used in producing and consuming goods; ensure that waste can be assimilated by the environment.
- Use energy (for example electricity) efficiently and sparingly.
- Ensure that the products of technology (for example motor cars) are environment-friendly.
- Buy products that meet high social and environmental standards.
- Adopt a life-style that ensures a reasonable quality of life but which also respects the finite resources of the earth.

### **3 Adopting a Simple Lifestyle**

Introduce the Lesson Materials Page 'Adopting a Simple Lifestyle' by reading the opening paragraph. Invite the learners to complete the page.

### **4 Ideas for You to Think About**

Distribute the Lesson Materials page 'Ideas for You to Think About'. Read through the texts with the learners, outlining the material and spiritual benefits of adopting a simple lifestyle. Discuss the questions with them.

### **5 Conclusion**

Briefly summarise the material and spiritual benefits of a simple lifestyle on the board in the form of a mind-map.

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## OTHER IDEAS

### 6 Human Gifts and Rights

CORD, p 385, offers a number of points for consideration to help students appreciate that gifts and rights are related to human needs.

- My talents and gifts are not only given to *me*; they are also given to my community.
- My community's needs are *my* needs; our world's needs are *our* needs.
- Sharing and service are what my gifts/talents/privileges are all about.
- Failure to share is greed - or at least irresponsibility.
- A person can be greedy; a group can be greedy; a company can be greedy; a nation can be greedy; an international group can be greedy.
- 'There is enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed.'

(Mahatma Gandhi)

### MATERIALS

#### LEARNER

- CIE. 2005. 'Adopting a Simple Lifestyle'
- CIE. 2005. 'Ideas for You to Think About'



## Lesson Materials



### Adopting a Simple Lifestyle

Many people talk about changing their life style, but how many families are really willing to follow through with a commitment to a new style of living? First, it is important to distinguish what we really need from what we could do without. Over-consumption must be looked at and measured. Next there will be a need for cut backs in spending and a realistic budget set up without dependency on credit cards. Care for the earth is crucial in a simple life style where there is dedication to live in right relationship with all creation.

• These are the things I need in order to survive and become a mature and happy person.

These are the things I also own but do not really need.

♦ In my home, we buy more than we need of certain items. These are often just thrown away. Here is a list of these items.

◇/...

**Lesson Materials**  **ADOPTING A SIMPLE LIFESTYLE (CONT.)**

◇ In my home, it would be possible for us to cut back our expenditure on certain items that make our lives more pleasant but which we don't really need. Here is a list of some of them.

◇ In my home, these are the ways in which we promote care of the environment.

In my home, these are some of the things we could also do to take care of the environment.

## Lesson Materials



### Ideas for You to Think About

"In reality, no one is either rich or poor because nothing *belongs* to any of us. We only remain alive by sharing: that is the fact. But the illusion that we can make ourselves secure by means of wealth is very attractive and has consistently had a very real and destructive effect in human society throughout the ages. Poor people in our culture and our world are deprived, devalued and marginalised."

(Adapted from Elaine Prevallet, *In Service of Life*, p 29)

- According to recent statistics, some 800 million people in the world are destitute and 10 000 die of starvation every day. What evidence do you have of poverty in the area where you live?
- Assuming you have your parents' permission, what do you 'own' that could easily be shared with poor people?

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The wisdom of many religious traditions attests to the value of simplifying our material lives. The practice is encouraged not because the material world is viewed as bad, but because a certain lack of clutter in one's external life seems to allow energies to stay focused. Internal clarity and external simplicity are often spiritual allies. Any middle or upper-class person who has personal experience in a "developing culture" will learn very quickly that one's perception of "need" is immensely inflated by consumerism, and perhaps experience *for the first time* a scaling down that invites a true sense of inner freedom.

(Adapted from *In Service of Life*, p 29)

What is required (in response to the ecological crisis) is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another and the world around us, within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

(From the *Common Declaration of John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch His holiness Bartholomew*, 10 June 2002)

There has been a tendency to accept that concern for the environment need only be a minority interest, not a priority for all Christians. What makes *The Call of Creation*\* particularly valuable is the connection it makes between concern for the environment and a fair use of the earth's resources. This is a Justice and Peace issue for, as it says there, "environmental destruction and social injustice often go hand-in-hand." (\*Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England)

(Aidan Reynolds in *The Tablet*, 23 August 2003)

According to the above authors, what are some of the spiritual and material benefits of adopting a simple life-style?



## LESSON 18: Environment and Faith Traditions



REFERENCE

Page 383 [ACTION & SERVICE - Work for Change]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (2) LSM: 'Religious Perspectives'
- (2) LSM: 'Comparing Faith Traditions'
- (3) Prepared check-list

### AIM

- To show the learners that all faith traditions express appreciation of and concern for the environment, and that shared religious beliefs are compelling expressions of human solidarity

### OUTCOMES

- SKL Learners develop oral communication and team-task skills.
- SKL Learners develop reading skills of analysis and synthesis.
- DAP Learners appreciate that religious beliefs are a source of solidarity among people of different cultures.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

Assuming a class of 40 learners, divide them into 8 groups of 5. Give each group a copy of *one* of the parts of the Lesson Materials page 'Religious Perspectives' (Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist), and a copy of the page 'Comparing Faith Traditions', which contains a check-list. While the learners are working on their texts, draw up a copy of the check-list on the board for the concluding summary. Keep a tight time-schedule.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### 1 Introduction

Concern about the serious decline in the natural resources of the earth is world-wide.

Introduce this idea with some examples, such as the following:

- It has been addressed by many of the world governments in summits such as the ones held in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002).
- It is also of concern to religious leaders of all faith traditions.

#### 2 Check-list

Set the learners the following task: to read through the given text and complete the check-list 'Comparing Faith Traditions' to the best of their ability. Explain how the check-list should be filled in: each group must only tick the column appropriate to the text they have been given. The eventual aim, which will be realised in the Summary, is to see on which points the different faith traditions agree about the environment and on which points they have differences.

### **3 Summary**

Using the prepared check-list, collate responses from the various groups. .... Point out that the learners have only had a limited text in front of them. These texts do not say everything about the particular religion.

### **4 Conclusion**

The exercise should make it apparent that different faith traditions are all concerned with appreciation for the natural environment and encourage their adherents to take care of it. Help the learners to realise that Religion is one of the ways in which we can build communities of mutual respect and appreciation. Such communities can only be of benefit to the environment.

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## **OTHER IDEAS**

### **5 Further Exploration**

Following the summary, learners may be assigned different readings for homework. They complete the appropriate column on their personal checklists.

#### **MATERIALS**

##### **LEARNER**

- CIE. 2005. 'Religious Perspectives'
- CIE. 2005. 'Comparing Faith Traditions'



# Lesson Materials



## Comparing Faith Traditions

### Instructions

Read the text that has been given to your group and then tick whether you can find evidence for the factors given in the left hand column of the check-list provided below. Only fill in the column appropriate to your group.

FACTORS	Christian	Jewish	Islamic	Hindu	Buddhist
Expresses belief in one divine power					
Expresses appreciation of the gifts of nature					
Holds that living things are interdependent					
Acknowledges the suffering in the world					
Holds that human beings are to blame for much of the suffering					
Stresses the importance of moral/spiritual values					
Stresses the importance of the virtue of justice in particular					
Promotes a simple life-style					
Values scientific and technological solutions					
Has peace as an objective of care of the environment					

## Lesson Materials



# Religious Perspectives

## A Christian Perspective

What follows are some of the points made by Pope John II and the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew I in their *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics* (10 June 2002).

We are gathered here today in the spirit of peace for the good of all human beings and for the care of creation. At this moment in history, at the beginning of the third millennium, we are saddened to see the daily suffering of a great number of people from violence, starvation, poverty and disease. We are also concerned about the negative consequences for humanity and for all creation resulting from the degradation of some basic natural resources such as water, air and land, brought about by an economic and technological progress which does not recognise and take into account its limits...

When we examine the social and environmental crisis that the world community is facing, we must conclude that we are betraying the mandate given to us by God: to be stewards called to co-operate with God in caring for the earth in holiness and wisdom...

Respect for creation stems from respect for human life and dignity ... Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in ecological awareness, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.

What God requires of us now is a sincere act of repentance for the way in which we have abused the gifts of the earth. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

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## Lesson Materials

### RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES (CONT.)

## A Jewish Perspective

When one reads the Bible, one is struck by the great number of texts that praise God for the abundance and magnificence of creation. The psalm you read at the beginning of this series of lessons (Psalm 104) is one example of this. This general attitude of appreciation is reflected in the customary blessings said on certain occasions. Here are three examples of these:

- On seeing trees in blossom: Blessed is the Eternal God, Ruler of the universe, whose world lacks nothing needful, and who has fashioned goodly creatures and lovely trees that enchant the heart.
- On seeing electrical storms: Blessed is the Eternal God, Ruler of the universe, whose power and might pervade the earth.
- On seeing a rainbow: Blessed is the Eternal God, Ruler of the universe, who remembers the covenant with Noah and keeps its promise faithfully with all creation.

Three attitudes, essential to Judaism, are revealed in these blessings: God provides for all our needs, God is powerful, and God is faithful to us and to all of creation.

The Jewish moral response to the degradation of the environment caused by human activity is rooted firmly in the Commandment: Thou shalt not kill. When one reads the teachings of important rabbis, one learns just how far Jews carry this commandment.

Maimonides, a Jewish doctor, author and religious commentator said:

*It is not only forbidden to destroy fruit-bearing trees, but whoever breaks vessels, tears clothes, demolishes a building, closes a water supply or wastes food in a destructive way, offends against the law "do not destroy".*

Modern rabbis take the doctrine further: Don't waste your wealth or your talents. Don't take drugs because they damage the mind and destroy your potential as a human being. Don't damage your body by self-inflicted wounds. Do not hunt animals unless you need them for food, and certainly do not hunt them for pleasure. Always preserve nature. Do not destroy God's gifts.

At the same time, Jews recognise that the preservation of the environment is not only a matter of moral prohibitions. One needs to take practical steps in advancing scientific and technological ways of ensuring the well-being of creation. Many Jews enter professions such as justice, teaching, and the various branches of science and medicine. They see this as their way of being faithful to God.

## Lesson Materials

### RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES (cont)

## A Muslim Perspective

*Human beings are the only creatures having the special qualities that enable them to serve the Earth. They are able to think and to make choices. The moral teachings of the Qur'an (the Muslim Scriptures) lead them to care about their environment.*

The Muslim moral attitude towards the environment is greatly affected by the fact that Islam is not only a set of beliefs or dogmas, it is a way of life. Its aim is to create a community of people who are bound to one another by shared beliefs and values and by their desire to serve the one true God – Allah. Care for the environment is seen as a moral imperative – both on a personal and public level.

*Zakat*, the giving of alms to the poor, is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is often described as a regular giving to charity. But it is more than this. It is a spiritual act and the most important duty of a Muslim after prayer. At the end of each year all Muslims, men and women, must give at least 2.5% of their savings as *zakat*. There is no upper limit to giving, as long as a person does not endanger the future of their family. All *zakat* giving should be generous. The reason for this is that Muslims believe that all wealth (including the natural resources of the Earth) has been given to them on trust by Allah.

**He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour remains hungry by his side.**

***(Instruction of an Islamic Hadith)***

*Zakat* is not intended as a tax on the rich. Rather it is a means of 'purifying' what remains of a person's money at the end of a year and also a way of keeping their soul pure from an excessive and unhealthy love of money and material things.

Islam has a very positive attitude to science. The Qur'an teaches that everything that Allah created reflects his mind and submits to his will. Science is the discipline through which human beings may come to learn more about the laws governing the universe and all the creatures that inhabit it. By engaging with this discipline, one comes to a greater appreciation of Allah himself. The purpose of science, then, is to understand and promote the integrity of creation. This has implications for our concern about the environment. Peace can only be attained if we follow God's instructions as revealed in the *Qur'an*.

The Five Pillars of Islam are:

- 1 a personal declaration of faith that there is only one Supreme Being and that Muhammad is his messenger;
- 2 the recitation of prayers five times every day;
- 3 the prescribed giving of alms – or money – to the poor;
- 4 fasting during the month of Ramadan; and
- 5 the making of a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a Muslim's lifetime.

## Lesson Materials

### RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES (cont)

## A Hindu Perspective

Hindus believe in one divine power – *Brahma*. All the other representations (statues) that we see in their worship are merely expressions of one or other of the qualities of Brahma.

The word Hindu entered the English language from a Persian source only in the nineteenth century. The Hindu term for the faith community is really *Sanatana Dharma*. Roughly translated, this means ‘the eternal essence of life’. This essence is not limited only to humans but is the essential quality that unites all beings – plants, animals and humans – with the universe that surrounds them and ultimately with the divine source of their existence. This perception of underlying unity is what causes Hindus to refuse to separate their religion from their daily life, or to separate their own faith from the other great faith traditions of the world. To them, all religions are part of the process of discovering the unity of God, humanity and nature.

*I am the seed of all existence. There is no being, moving or still, that exists without Me.*  
(Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita)

*If your image of the world includes all things which are naturally there, then you will keep this world intact by keeping all those things intact... A forest, at one level, represents the whole world; it includes the whole creation. You are also part of that forest. You can reorder it, but you cannot be outside it.*

(Hindu sage, Banwari, in Ranchor Prime, *Hinduism and Ecology*)

Based on the understanding that an environmental approach to life is part and parcel of spiritual culture, and flows from human self-development, Prime, in the same book, quotes another Hindu sage’s idea of ‘human ecology’. He identifies seven facets of human existence which together make this up:

- The inherent splendour of the natural creation. Human beings are part of this splendour and should therefore love and respect it
- To understand their relationship with creation, human beings need to engage with a spiritual path.
- Culture is expressed in the way a society lives, how its people behave. It is an outward expression of their inner spirituality. The degradation of the earth is a sign that people have lost sight of their spiritual path.
- Heritage springs from culture. It is the way in which we pass on our values to the next generation. If human beings neglect their heritage by acting irresponsibly towards the natural environment, they will only be able to hand on distorted values to their children.
- Experiencing the cultures of other civilisations nourishes the soul.
- When we have learned to see the common thread that unites different expressions of human culture and heritage, only then we can have a full sense of what it means to be human. Nature’s welfare and human welfare cannot be separated from one another.
- All of the above points taken together add up to Human Ecology. They proceed from human beings situated in their natural environment, the planetary forest. If we do not find this initial point of contact with our natural origins, we fail to find ourselves in relation to the world and to truth.

## Lesson Materials

### RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES (cont)

## A Buddhist Perspective

Buddhists are the followers of Siddharta Gautama Buddha. The word *buddha* means ‘the enlightened one’. Buddhists believe that the purpose of life is to attain enlightenment, or full understanding. Siddharta attained the state of enlightenment on the ‘third watch’ of his long spiritual retreat:

*‘Then as the third watch drew on he thought: Alas, all living things wear themselves out. Over and over again they are born, they age and die, pass on to a new life, and are reborn. What is more, greed and false hopes blind them and they are blind from birth. Frightened, they do not yet know how to get out of this great ill!’*

Siddharta found that lack of self-knowledge was the key. Once you understand what caused all the problems that happen to living creatures, including yourself, and through that know how to live your life, then birth, death and illness will cease. He passed this teaching down to his disciples in Ten Precepts. Two of these are given here:

- To refrain from harming any living thing: no living thing may be intentionally harmed. An action is wrong if its intention is wrong. No-harming starts in the heart and so Buddhists are encouraged to cultivate ‘loving kindness’ towards the whole of the natural order.
- To refrain from taking intoxicants that cloud the mind: if the mind is blurred, the person cannot lead the kind of thoughtful life that is essential for enlightenment, or true understanding.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the head of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The following passages are taken from the lecture he gave on that occasion:

*Because we all share this small planet Earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. That is not just a dream, but a necessity. We are dependent on each other in so many ways that we can no longer live in isolated communities and ignore what is happening outside those communities...*

*... We know that to wage a nuclear war today, for example, would be a form of suicide; that to pollute the air or oceans in order to achieve some short-term benefit, would be to destroy the very basis of our survival. As individuals and nations are becoming increasingly interdependent, we have no other choice than to develop what I call a sense of universal responsibility.*

*... But war or peace; the destruction or the protection of nature; the violation or promotion of human rights and democratic freedoms; poverty or material well-being; the lack of moral and spiritual values; and the breakdown or development of human understanding, are not isolated phenomena that can be tackled independently of one another. In fact, they are interrelated at all levels and need to be approached with that understanding.*