

*Buddhism and the Environment: A Sacred Bond with Nature*

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Venerable Monks, Madam Director-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,  
 and Friends in Dhamma,

It is a deep honour to speak before you on this sacred day of Vesak, here at the United Nations Office in Geneva—a centre of global cooperation and human dignity. Today, as we commemorate the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, we do so with a renewed sense of urgency, for our planet—our only home—is calling for help.

The theme of this year’s reflection—**Buddhism and the Environment**—could not be more timely or more necessary.

From the moment of his birth in the Lumbini grove, the Buddha’s life was intimately connected with the natural world. He attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, taught in the forests, and passed away between twin sala trees. Nature was not just a backdrop—it was his refuge, his witness, and his companion. In Buddhism, the Earth is not a commodity. It is a living field of interdependence, a sacred expression of life. To harm the Earth is to harm ourselves. This is why, at the moment of his enlightenment, the Buddha touched the Earth—affirming our deep connection with all beings. He did not claim dominion over nature; he claimed kinship.

One of the central teachings of Buddhism is *paticca-samuppāda*, or dependent origination. It teaches that all things arise in dependence upon conditions. Nothing exists in isolation. This insight is not only spiritual—it is ecological. Forests, rivers, oceans, and the atmosphere are not merely “resources” to be exploited—they are

relationships to be respected.

The destruction of nature is not just an environmental issue; it is a spiritual disconnection. When we forget our place within the web of life, we fall into the patterns of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*)—the very poisons the Buddha warned against.

Today’s environmental crisis is not only the result of ignorance—it is the result of our choices: how we consume, how we travel, how we produce energy, and how we treat other beings.

From a Buddhist perspective, these actions are rooted in unwholesome mental states—craving, materialism, and the illusion of separation. Buddhism teaches that we cannot heal the planet without also healing the mind.

To protect the Earth, we must cultivate:

- **Mindfulness** (*sati*): to see clearly the impact of our actions.
- **Compassion** (*karuṇā*): to care for all beings, not just humans.
- **Contentment** (*santutthi*): to live simply, without excess.

Throughout Buddhist history, nature has been revered. In Theravāda countries, especially Thailand, trees are ordained as a way to protect forests. In Mahāyāna texts, bodhisattvas vow to protect not only people, but the entire natural world. In Tibetan Buddhism, sacred landscapes are preserved with profound spiritual respect.

Modern Buddhist leaders—from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to forest monks in Southeast Asia—have spoken about climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss as urgent moral concerns.

These teachings are not abstract. They translate into action: reducing waste, planting trees, conserving water, supporting sustainable economies, and advocating for policies that protect the vulnerable—both human and non-human.

Today, the Saṅgha is no longer just the monastic community—it includes all of us. It

includes activists, educators, diplomats, and youth. It includes Indigenous communities whose ecological wisdom echoes the Dhamma. It includes scientists and spiritual seekers alike.

As members of this global Saṅgha, we are called to respond—not with despair, but with **skillful means** (*upāya*) and **right action** (*sammā kammanta*).

Let us remember: Buddhist environmentalism is not only about protest—it is about practice:

- Eating mindfully
- Consuming responsibly
- Travelling lightly
- Speaking up for those without voices—the animals, the forests, and the future generations.

Here in Geneva—a city that stands for peace, neutrality, and humanitarian values—we are reminded that environmental justice is also a matter of human rights. Those least responsible for climate change—small island nations, Indigenous peoples, and the poor—are often those who suffer the most. The Buddhist path calls us to protect the vulnerable, share resources fairly, and act not out of fear, but out of compassion.

The Buddha's teachings invite us not only to understand the causes of suffering—but to transform them.

Now is the time to act with:

- Clarity of vision
- Steadiness of purpose
- Kindness in every step

Let us integrate environmental mindfulness into the UN's mission for peace and development. Let us shape policies rooted in compassion. Let us educate not only with facts, but with values. Let us walk gently on the Earth—not as masters, but as

grateful guests.

We are reminded by the *Dhammapada*, which teaches:

**“The one who protects all beings, who harms none,  
Who cultivates love and lives in wisdom—  
That person is truly noble.”**

On this Vesak Day, may we renew our vow to be such people.

May we live in harmony with nature.

May we walk the path of peace—not only in prayer halls, but in forests, farms, and cities.

May we touch the Earth with reverence—and act to preserve her with courage.

May all beings be safe.

May our Earth be healed.

May wisdom guide our world.

Thank you.

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