



# **Environmental and Spiritual Preservation**

**Buddhism in Every Step** (B8)

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# **Environmental and Spiritual Preservation**

In the year 2010, the eruptions of the Eyjafjallajokull and Katla Volcanos in Iceland caused major air traffic disruptions in Europe. The volcanic ash plume spread across the sky, causing serious threats to flight safety and grounded the majority of airplanes in Europe. Not only did the eruptions have a severe impact on the economy, they also caused fear and anxiety in people. Now, years after the eruptions, everything seems to have returned to normal.

As the volcanic eruption is mentioned, it has been said that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an era of environmentalism. Indeed, the United Nations' (UN) Declaration on the Human Environment was introduced in 1972 to raise awareness about environmental preservation.

In addition, the UN also declared June 5th World Environment Day (WED) to urge people to realize that we only have one earth and that humans and the environment are one and inseparable. Environmental preservation has since been a central focus of the world.

In the years that followed, the UN held several Earth Summits to discuss environmental issues, and various international conventions have taken place in the hopes that through establishing international cooperation and treaties, nations will minimize emissions of carbon dioxide and other toxic gases that are harmful to the ozone layer in order to slow down climate change.

However, it is regretful and worrisome to see that, despite the fact that the world has already realized the worsening problem of climate change and the destruction of the ecosystem, “to value environmental preservation and rescue the earth” is still only a slogan to many and is not being put into action.

A reason for this is the conflict between environmental preservation and the demand for a material life. Most people still see physical comfort as their priority. Home appliances, such as refrigerators and air conditioners, and transportation vehicles, such as

motorcycles and automobiles, emit waste that causes severe damage to the ozone layer. As a result, living things on earth may eventually lose their protection against harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.

In addition, humanity's pursuit of materialism has caused extreme industrial development, which consumes large amounts of fuel, such as coal and petroleum. The emission of excessive greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, has resulted in extreme weather conditions and has effected climate change.

Extreme weather includes either severe cold or heat and even the occurrence of floods and droughts. For example, in July and August of 2010 heat waves swept across the Northern Hemisphere. More than fifty thousand people in Japan were struck by heat stroke, resulting in over a hundred deaths. In Russia, continued high temperatures and drought caused forest fires that almost engulfed Moscow City, resulting in an estimated loss equivalent to fifteen billion U.S. dollars.

Wildfires caused by high temperatures also occurred in mid-America, Portugal, and Spain. Worse, in Kashmir, India, sudden torrential rain after six months of drought caused the worst flood in one hundred years, killing more than one hundred people,

wounding more than four hundred, leaving thousands of people homeless, and more than six hundred people went missing. This downpour immediately turned Kashmir, known as “heaven on earth,” into hell on earth. As the intense heat of summer covered Europe, Asia, and America, South American countries such as Paraguay and Argentina were struck by a very rare cold front, killing more than a hundred people and thousands of animals.

Climate change is certainly related to large-scale construction and excessive overdevelopment. All people know that forests conserve water, produce oxygen, and absorb exhaust fumes, such as carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide, which help reduce the speed of climate change. In particular, experts say that the tropical rain forest within the Amazon River basin, the largest rainforest on earth, produces 33 percent of the earth’s oxygen. Thus, it is called “the lungs of the earth.” If all of the Amazon rainforest is logged one day, 1/3 of the oxygen that sustains life on earth will disappear. When that happens, not only will our living environment worsen, the earth’s climate will also become more unpredictable.

Sadly, such an important rainforest that serves to sustain the lives of humanity and the entire earth

is not being valued or protected. In the past few decades, massive logging has occurred because of paper manufacturing, grazing lands, farmlands, and construction.

Decreasing the size of tropical rainforests not only results in decreased forest resources, thousands of species that live in them will also become extinct, and the entire ecosystem will face severe damage. In particular, excessive logging will cause soil erosion, desertification, and land erosion. Excessive cultivation, deforestation, and construction by humans have also resulted in frequent landslides. For example, the September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1999, earthquake in Taiwan caused a mountain slide in Nantou Country that killed and wounded countless individuals. The Morakot Typhoon caused Siaolin Village to be buried in a landslide. The floods of Zhouqu in Gansu and Gongshan in Yunnan also resulted in mudslides that destroyed beautiful landscapes overnight.

All of these are signs that the threats which environmental problems place on humanity's future survival do not only include climate change and damage to the ozone layer; there are also sharp decreases of forest resources, desertification, accelerated extinction, hazardous and toxic waste, and acid rain caused

by massive industrial air pollution that severely pollute rivers and soil. As a result, humanity will face the crisis of water and food shortages or even wars over limited natural resources.

For some time, many nations have been focusing on the fight against climate change. Nowadays, many Western scientists use statistics to continuously warn humanity about the seriousness of climate change. If people do not pay attention to environmental preservation and do not control the emission of carbon dioxide, then by the end of this century the earth's temperature will rise anywhere from 1.4 to 6.4 degrees Celsius. When that time comes, this rise will cause destructive changes to humanity's future.

How do you ensure all people understand climate change, including the natural calamities a one degree Celsius rise in temperature will bring to humanity? National Geographic broadcasted a special documentary called *Six Degrees Could Change the World*. The documentary explains that when the entire earth's temperature increases by one degree, the Western United States would face severe droughts, causing most of it to turn into a desert.

When the earth's temperature increases by two degrees, Greenland's glaciers will melt faster. When

that time comes, the sea level will rise by seven meters. Some coastal cities, including New York, London, Bangkok, Shanghai, and Taipei, will be entirely flooded.

After passing the critical point when the earth's temperature increases by three degrees, humanity will have no power to control climate change. When that time comes, summer heat waves in Paris will become a regular phenomenon. There will be no ice in the North Pole during summer. The Amazon Rainforest will gradually wither, and the drought may cause rainforest fires.

When the earth's temperature increases by four degrees, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Venice will be flooded by the ocean. The world's largest rivers may dry up, jeopardizing the existence of millions to billions of people.

When the earth's temperature increases by five degrees, the north and south temperate zones will be unsuitable for living. Water sources in Los Angeles, Mumbai, and Cairo will dry up. The number of climate refugees around the world when that time comes cannot be estimated.

When the earth's temperature increases by six degrees, many of the major cities will be lost to

the rising seas. Natural disasters will then become the norm. When that day arrives, it is the so-called “end of the world.” Humanity will probably become extinct like the dinosaur species. From then on, human civilization will no longer exist, like the dinosaur species, leaving human civilization a thing of the past.

Will the above predictions of natural disasters occur? When will they happen? Even the world’s top scientists cannot be sure. However, British scientist Stephen Hawking was the first to provide sincere advice for humanity. He thinks that if humanity wants to continue to live in the future, we should abandon earth and start immigrating into space!

We do not need to be afraid of scientists’ speculations or warnings. But we should not take them as sensations or completely ignore them either. In recent years, humanity has been exploiting the earth ceaselessly, and this has caused nature to strike back. Thus, the continuous natural disasters all over the world, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, droughts, hurricanes, fires, landslides, and mudflows, should be a warning for us: the earth is sick!

Just as we physically get sick, the earth is sick too. When people are sick, they need to be treated

and saved. When the earth is sick, it also needs everyone to care for it and save it. To save the earth, we must begin with environmental preservation. On the other hand, the protection of nature depends on the self-awakening of humanity, which starts with preservation of the spiritual environment.

If we do not wish to become refugees of climate and environmental changes, the most urgent task for humanity right now would be to ensure that environmental and spiritual preservation are well-practiced. I would like to present the following four Buddhist perspectives on environmental and spiritual preservation:

## **I. The Buddhist Perspective on Environmental Preservation**

As mentioned before, environmental preservation is one of the most discussed topics today. Environmental preservation includes the care and protection of the natural environment and respect for all lives. All of today's environmental organizations are actively devoted to promoting the preservation of the environment as well as maintaining balanced ecosystems.

The truth is the concepts of environmental preservation, the protection of life, and rescuing the earth are not only recent topics but have existed since ancient times. From as early as the Buddha's time, the words and conduct of Sakyamuni Buddha and various great bodhisattvas all show that Buddhism has a deep awareness of environmental preservation.

Buddhism has always advocated protecting and not killing life. To protect life and to abstain from killing means respecting all living beings. The Buddha established summer retreats because he was concerned that during the rainy seasons, when the monastics went out to beg for alms, they would step on and kill the insects and young sprouts on the ground.

In one of the Buddha's previous lifetimes, out of his compassionate protection of life, he cut off his own flesh to feed an eagle and sacrificed his own body for a hungry tiger. Furthermore, King Asoka planted trees and built forests to provide shelter for living beings, established animal hospitals, and set a rule of not killing within the palace kitchen, which demonstrates the Buddhist practice of environmental preservation and protecting life.

Buddhism advocates that all living beings possess Buddha nature and that both the sentient and

insentient possess the potential to attain Buddhahood. As mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees will all attain Buddhahood, Buddhism advocates not killing, and thus no deforestation, no stealing, and no unlawful logging. The Buddhist doctrine of equality views all beings as equals and advocates that not only do humans and animals deserve love and care, but mountains, rivers, and the great earth also need to be protected.

In *The Sadaparibhuta Bodhisattva Sutra*, a bodhisattva disposed of every piece of waste with care to not pollute the land. He spoke every word with caution in order not to frighten the land. He took every step with fear of hurting the land. This is in fact a sense of environmentalism shown through the compassion of caring for things.

Buddhism has always played a vital role in protecting wildlife and the environment. In the past, many Buddhist masters planted trees to build forests, dredged rivers, repaired bridges, built roads, cherished resources, and when they gave Dharma talks, they urged people to protect life, release life, and to observe vegetarianism to nurture a mind that cherishes one's blessings and possessions. Thus, since ancient times, monastics can be said to be the best volunteers in promoting environmental preservation.

Although the phrase “environmental preservation” did not appear during ancient times, Amitabha Buddha was already an expert in this area. His Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss has grounds covered in gold, seven layers of pavilions, seven tiers of railings, and seven rows of jeweled trees. This dignified and pure environment is without pollution of the water or air, or any other environmental pollution caused by noise, toxic gas, or nuclear radiation. In particular, residents of the Pure Land are all people of virtue gathered together. Everyone is physically and mentally healthy, has an infinite lifespan, and is pure in their three karmas of body, speech, and mind, free from the three poisons. No one logs trees willfully, and everywhere in sight are brightly colored flowers, lush trees, and meadows. Thus, Amitabha Buddha is indeed a pioneer in physical, spiritual, and environmental preservation.

The Pure Lands in Buddhism only provide for public welfare, not pollution; there is only beauty, no uncleanness or disorder. Buddhism is a religion that places great value on environmental preservation. Such a thought originated from the law of dependent origination, which Sakyamuni Buddha awakened to. This law tells us that everything in this world

depends on various causes and conditions to exist. For example, in order for humans to exist on earth, they must have this great land to support them. They also need the three essentials of sunlight, air, and water in their daily lives in order to survive. Thus, human survival cannot depart from the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind.

The four elements are what all matters in the universe depend on to exist. Buddhism believes that myriad phenomena, including the earth, people's lives, flowers, grasses, sands, and stones all depend on the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind to come into existence. For example, in order for a flower to bloom, there must be fertile soil, which is the earth element. The growth of a flower also requires water, sunlight, and air, which are the water element, fire element, and wind element respectively. Without any one of these, a flower will not be able to blossom.

The human body also relies on a balance between the four elements to sustain life. The solid components of the body such as hair, nails, teeth, skin, bone, muscle, and flesh belong to the earth element; the fluids or moist components of the body such as mucus, saliva, pus, blood, phlegm, tears, and sweat belong to the water element; a body's temperature or

warmth belongs to the fire element; while the air that we breathe belongs to the wind element.

Just as everything in this world is composed of the four elements, the earth is also the same, since it depends on earth, water, fire, and wind to maintain operation. With the great earth, we can build houses, plant crops, and survive. Some people can live without eating for an entire day but will not survive without drinking water. Places with water mean survival, places with water mean prosperity, and places with water are suitable for communities to flourish. In this world, the sun is not the only important thing. The reason that humanity is able to surpass other animals in survival is because they discovered fire, which is extremely important to a civilization. No living creature in this world can live without air, just as it has been said, “Life exists between each breath”; without the flowing of wind, there would be no air, and all forms of life would suffocate to death.

The four elements provide the essential conditions for survival, yet they can also threaten the safety of life. Since ancient times, hasn't humanity been battling against natural disasters brought about by water, fire, wind, and earth? A seemingly peaceful life does not guarantee safety from unexpected disasters

such as earthquakes. Take January of 2010 for example: First, there was the 7.3 magnitude earthquake in Haiti, followed by an 8.8-magnitude earthquake in Chile that also generated a tsunami. One month later, a 7.1-magnitude earthquake occurred in Yushu of China's Qinghai Province. All of these resulted in tremendous casualties and damages.

The truth is disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and storms, have existed long before today. According to the Buddhist sutras, the world's formation is divided into the following four stages: establishment, existence, deterioration, and destruction. Towards the end of the stage of destruction, not even the realm of form can escape the three disasters of fire, flood, and wind.

According to the teachings of Buddhism, after karma has been created due to severe transgressions, in addition to exhausted merits, people must bear their karmic retributions once the time comes. As a result, disasters will come one after another. First fire occurs; everything below the First Meditation Heaven will be burned down by fire. This is what the Chan masters mean in saying that everything will be burned down by fire in the kalpa of destruction. After the fire, flooding will occur, and the entire world will

be under a vast expanse of water. Everything below the Second Meditation Heaven will be flooded. Next, wind will blow everything below the Third Meditation Heaven away. This is much more severe, just as high land or the higher stories of a building will not be affected by a flood; however, when a hurricane comes, fragile buildings will collapse, while the stronger ones will not be affected.

Nowadays, people often mention the end of the world. According to Buddhism, human beings go through the cycle of birth, old age, sickness, and death; thoughts within the mind go through the process of arising, existence, change, and extinction; weather involves a cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter; the world experiences the stages of formation, existence, decay, and extinction. Since there are such stages, of course, there will be an end of the world.

However, there is no need to be overly worried because the so-called “age of the end of Dharma,” commonly known as the end of the world, is still many thousands of years away if calculated according to the Buddhist perspective of time. There will still be some unavoidable disasters, but they are not the universal ones that will destroy the entire earth immediately.

Furthermore, while the First, Second, and Third Meditation Heavens will be destroyed by the three disasters, there is still a Fourth Heaven, which is free from disasters. Therefore, while there may be such disasters as earth, water, fire, and wind, as long as we have the right conditions and merits, we will be among those who are fortunate enough to live within the Fourth Meditation Heaven. Thus there is no need to be afraid or worried. Instead, it is better to accrue merits. As long as we love and cherish our blessings, accumulate merits and virtue, and look after the earth, then we will give it a longer life. Nevertheless, the future of the earth still depends on human behaviors because everything in the world follows the law of cause and effect.

## **II. The Importance of Environmental Preservation**

More than one hundred years ago, Native American Indian Chief Seattle made a statement that shocked the entire world: “This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in

it.” What he means is that we as humans may utilize the earth’s resources, but this does not mean we own the earth because hundreds and thousands of beings, sentient and insentient, coexist with us. We are all part of the global village and thus share equal rights to life. That is why we must show respect and care for other beings.

To love the earth and protect the environment means to respect life and protect the ecosystem. In the same way, to love the earth means to protect ecosystem and respect all living beings’ right to live.

Within the universe, not only do humans have lives, but the mountains, rivers, flowers, sun, moon, and stars all have lives. The Consciousness-Only School says, “The three realms are only in the mind; the myriad phenomena are only in the consciousness.” The greatness of nature is filled with life. Without a person’s dedication and wisdom, how can clocks and watches exist? Thus, clocks and watches embody the person’s life. A house is only possible because of a person’s design and supervision, and thus the house embodies the person’s life.

From the Buddhist perspective, life is the most valuable thing in this world. Anything that is active, alive, and serves a purpose has meaning and value.

The value of life lies in loving-kindness and compassion, while the meaning of life is to cherish everything; whether it be a piece of clothing, a table, a chair, an air conditioner, or an automobile, cherish and look after it. Lengthening its time of usage means extending its life.

Everything in this world has a life, and thus, we cannot just cherish our own life but also other lives. Without other lives in this world, there would not be causes and conditions that allow our existence. “I” would not exist. Therefore, in order to survive, we must love and cherish our causes and conditions by “being one” and “coexisting” with all things. Only mutual respect, assistance, and support can enable all beings to coexist on earth.

“Oneness and coexistence” is the most liberal and beautiful idea of the modern era. It means humanity should celebrate differences and share commonalities. Just like the five facial features, only by embracing and respecting each other can we coexist and live as one.

Sadly, for too long, humanity has regarded itself as “master of the myriad creations of this earth,” thinking that it can dominate everything. Humans can even be so selfish as to think that every life and

resource on earth is at their disposal. Thus they willfully consume and waste, recklessly exploit and destroy, and ruthlessly harm and slaughter.

If we take a look, people nowadays kill and eat anything that flies in the sky, crawls on land, and swims in water. Just to satisfy their taste buds, they catch and slaughter without any consideration, causing the extinction of rare species and indirectly destroying the balance of the ecosystem.

Moreover, due to humanity's greed and neglect of environmental preservation, the laws of nature have been violated, causing the earth to be covered with serious wounds and damage. In the past few decades, many mountain slopes in Taiwan have been excessively cultivated, deforested, and developed due to the growing demand for places of leisure, tea plantations, and orchards. As a result, mudslides have caused severe sedimentation in rivers and reservoirs. The excessive excavation of sand and gravel has caused damage to bridges and roads. The massive extraction of underground water has caused land subsidence. Burning toxic waste and the improper treatment of wastes, such as industrial wastewater, nuclear waste, and industrial manure, have polluted the air, water, and land.

As we are faced with a natural environment that is being destroyed, an unbalanced ecosystem, and an earth covered in wounds, how should humanity save itself? I think the most urgent matter is for humanity to wake up and realize that the earth we live on is in itself a great universe. Within it, the land, mountains, rivers, forests, meadows, and social environments all play a very important part in our survival. Thus, we must be grateful to various kinds of causes and conditions, cherish what others have given and done for us, respect life with a humble heart, and treat all living beings with equality.

All living beings depend on the earth to survive; the earth is humanity's home. The earth protects our lives and supplies us with resources for survival. Without the earth, where would humanity and all living beings reside? Thus when the earth is facing devastating damages and gasping for breath, since we regard ourselves as "masters of the myriad creations of this earth," we must be the first to protect the environment by caring for wildlife and nature, not carelessly killing, planting trees, preventing excessive deforestation, protecting water resources, disposing of waste properly, using commodities sparingly, and recycling.

We should cherish our blessings, cherish our conditions, cherish our possessions, and cherish lives. This is a very wonderful concept in Buddhism. As has been said, “Cherish what we have to eat and wear, not because it is our wealth, but our blessings.” To apply this saying to today’s situation means to love and care for the earth. In other words, we should value environmental preservation and cherish our resources. Only with the actual practice of environmental preservation and caring for nature and wildlife can the green hills and crystal clear water on earth last over time; then promoting personal character and purifying the mind will be possible, so we can leave behind a beautiful living environment for our future generations and ensure physical and mental health for humanity in the future.

### **III. The Relationship between Environmental and Spiritual Preservation**

Survival is a right all sentient beings have. But as humans are the central focus of Buddhism, we find that within the universe, humans are the most precious. Between heaven and earth and amongst all animals, humans are among the few who stand erect. With

our head pointing at the heavens and feet standing firm between heaven and earth, we are unlike other animals that often have their backs turned against heaven and are unable to always stand on two legs.

Humans are “masters of the myriad creations of this earth” but are also the creators of problems. The arising of all problems in this world is related to humans, including today’s problems concerning environmental preservation. They also arise because of humanity’s selfishness, ignorance, and interruption of the harmony and natural cycles of the world, to the point where there are continuous natural calamities and changes. Thus how can we solve the present problems of environmental preservation? Besides preserving the ecosystem, we should also place value on preserving our spiritual environment.

Preserving the ecosystem includes nature conservation, air purification, cleaning water sources, controlling noise pollution, trash management, and radiation protection. Also, the protection of biodiversity, ecology, and the entire earth are all under the area of environmental preservation. Preserving the spiritual environment includes the purification of concepts, language, and intentions. For example, when you refuse useless knowledge and the pollution of thoughts,

then that is the preservation of thoughts. When your concepts are righteous and always optimistic, then that is the preservation of concepts. When your speech is pure and you refrain from swearing, duplicitous speech, and speaking harshly, then that is the preservation of language. When you have no worries, jealousy, unfairness, hatred, and such negative emotions, then that is the preservation of the mind.

Protecting the ecosystem relies on everyone's concerted support. The preservation of the spiritual environment relies on the individual to purify the three karmas of body, speech, and mind. Environmental preservation usually takes place externally, yet internally, the purity of the mind is the greatest environmental preservation because Buddhism believes the establishment of the notion of environmental preservation should start from the human mind.

Our mind is like a factory. If the factory facilities are in good condition and the factory processes are normal, then the products will be high quality. If the facilities are not good, then not only are the products low quality, they will also pollute the air, water, and the entire environment. Thus, environmental preservation should start from the mind. When the mind is well-protected, then preserving the external

environment will be successful. It is as the “Buddha Land Chapter” in *The Vimalakirti Sutra* states, “If one wants to be in a Pure Land, one should purify the mind. When the mind is pure, the land is pure.”

But how are we able to do spiritual and environmental preservation? It is like the saying, “To do a good job, one must first sharpen one’s tools.” Usually, we sweep the floor with a broom, wash clothes with laundry detergent, and battle with weapons in good condition. Similarly, we need to clean away the filth in our minds with tools and weapons such as right view, right faith, compassion, wisdom, tolerance, diligence, friendliness, devotion, sacrifice, shamefulness, repentance, and so on. With these tools, the mind will be clear, bright, and clean. Then we will be able to defeat the army of defilement, become invincible, and win every fight.

Economists aim to “tap new resources and economize on expenses.” This does not just apply to money and materials. Actually, it is the greed, hatred, and ignorance of human minds that mainly causes the destruction of the ecosystem and the energy crisis. Thus, to “tap new resources” is to open up the source of Dharma. It is to also open up our own shamefulness, gratitude, joy, and mind. To “economize on

expenses” is to reduce the amount of money used. This is like restraining our own greed and hatred. Thus, placing value on environmental preservation and caring for the earth requires us to “tap new resources and economize on expenses.”

To advocate environmental preservation, a Fo Guang Shan Devotees’ Gathering for Environmental and Spiritual Preservation Ceremony was specially organized during the Devotees’ Gathering in 1992 at Fo Guang Shan. It aimed to encourage everyone to participate in the Environment and Spiritual Preservation and Purification Campaign. It was hoped that everyone would start with beautifying the mind and spirit and then extend outwards to beautify the environment.

At the event, the following twelve guidelines for practicing the preservation of body and mind were offered:

- (1) Speak quietly – do not disturb others.
- (2) Keep the ground clean – do not litter.
- (3) Keep the air clean – do not smoke or pollute.
- (4) Respect oneself and others – do not commit any violence.
- (5) Be polite – do not intrude on others.

- (6) Smile – do not face others with an angry expression.
- (7) Speak kindly – do not utter abusive words.
- (8) Follow the rules – do not seek exemptions or privileges.
- (9) Mind your actions – do not violate ethical rules.
- (10) Consume consciously – do not waste.
- (11) Be grounded – do not live aimlessly.
- (12) Practice kindness – do not create malice.

Environmental preservation starts with oneself. It starts with purification of the individual; it then progresses to leading the nation, society, and the entire world in purification. Hence, in recent years, Fo Guang Shan has been actively advocating the four givings and four harmonies of Humanistic Buddhism. It is hoped that during our everyday lives we will do our best to “give others confidence, give others joy, give others hope, and give others convenience.” By practicing this Fo Guang motto, one will continuously purify and elevate oneself. As such, one will be able to assist in establishing a Humanistic Pure Land of “family harmony achieved through deference, interpersonal harmony achieved through respect,

social harmony achieved through cooperation, and world harmony achieved through peace.”

In addition, BLIA has continuously initiated and organized spiritual environment preservation events for many years, such as Retrieve Your Heart, the Seven Admonitions Campaign, the Compassion and Loving-Kindness Campaign, and the Three Acts of Goodness Campaign. These were all to purify the minds of people and reform society’s customs.

Especially within recent years, climate change has continued to worsen. To resist climate change and save the earth, BLIA World Headquarters passed motions at the Fifth Meeting of the Fourth Board of Directors. Resolutions were made to save the earth together by reinforcing actions of environmental preservation, energy conservation, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, planting more forests, using non-disposable cutlery, recycling, and separating trash.

Currently, BLIA chapters around the globe have planted over five million trees as part of the campaign for environmental preservation. Around the world, they have also conducted clean-ups of river banks, beaches, oceans, and parks, so the environment will become clean and green.

Besides that, BLIA Chungwa and *The Merit Times* also organized the International Vegetarian & Organic Food Festival with the spirit of environmental preservation and to urge the public to cherish the earth together. At the same time, the International Forum on Ecological Awareness: How Nations Take Stewardship of the Commons was organized, and economist Professor Charles H.C. Kao was invited to be the host. Besides the attendance of Environmental Protection Administration Minister Stephen Shen, International Department of Norsk Energi Consultant Allison Eun Joo Yi, and television commentator Sisy Chen, eight hundred participants gathered together to read "A Prayer for Our Natural Environment." Everyone took an oath to implement energy saving techniques and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Recently, every time devotees take refuge in the Triple Gem, I lead everyone in saying, "I am a Buddha!" This phrase is indeed an amazing saying because if everyone willingly accepts that they are a Buddha, then couples will not argue. If everyone accepts the motto "I am a Buddha," then the relationships between oneself and others will not be filled with blame and complaints. If everyone accepts the motto "I am a Buddha," then they will not smoke,

drink alcohol, or commit crimes. The motto “I am a Buddha” is not only helpful for oneself: If one accepts the motto “I am a Buddha,” one will treat others and the world’s myriad phenomenon with compassion and cherishment. This is spiritual preservation, which is saving the earth.

Thus, as long as people claim “I am a Buddha,” then there is Buddha in everyone’s mind. In their eyes, they see the world of the Buddha. In their ears, all noises are the sounds of the Buddha. From their mouths are the words of the Buddha. All that one does are compassionate deeds. Then, even growing up in the polluted human world, we can ensure spiritual environmental preservation and build a Pure Land. This is the actualization of a Pure Land on earth.

#### **IV. How to Actualize Environmental Preservation in Daily Life**

To establish a humanistic Pure Land is the ultimate goal of Humanistic Buddhism. However, we cannot just dream of an ideal goal; we also need to take action in actualizing it. As the saying goes, “It is better to practice a teaching than to lecture on it.” Although modern people are generally aware of environmental

preservation, what is more important is responding by taking action and participating in environmental preservation campaigns.

To actualize environmental preservation, each person must first know the concept of environmental preservation. The instillation of environmental preservation should start with education. Adults need to set an example for children. For instance, parents need to teach their children to respect life and cherish and care for all things. Teachers need to teach their students to respect elders, treat others with manners, and so on. To elevate the notion of morality and maintain the public environment, we need to start especially by reinforcing awareness through education.

An elderly American lady once saw a teenager discarding an empty pop can on the ground, so she said, “Young man, pick up the can. You can’t just throw your trash on the ground.”

The youth answered, “This is a public road, not your home, so why should it matter to you? Mind your own business. I won’t pick it up.”

The old lady then said, “How can it not be my business? This is our living environment. If you wantonly throw things away, then trash will be everywhere, will pollute our environment, and decrease the value of our property. How can it not be my business?”

Yes! In our everyday lives, when we wantonly throw things away, we are hurting the environment. By carelessly letting things crumple in our hands, we are also wasting the great earth's resources. On the contrary, if we can recycle in our everyday lives, especially scrap paper, then not only will there be renewable resources, we will also decrease the logging of trees, which is a meritorious deed.

According to statistics, a tree that takes ten years to grow can be cut down in a matter of minutes. The amount of diapers a toddler uses from birth to the age of two requires twenty trees to produce. Every ton of paper recycled can help save twenty trees that are 8 meters tall with a diameter of 14 centimeters. Using recycled paper can save around 400,000 trees from being logged. Thus, recycling waste paper and reusing it decreases the logging of trees and can also save water resources.

Besides reusing scrap paper, there are also many ways to recycle resources in our everyday lives. If we can actively enforce the separation of trash and recycling, then there will be renewed resources. Not only can this decrease pollution, it can also turn trash into wealth.

Many years ago, in order for Fo Guang Shan to raise funds for Fo Guang University, many BLIA

members took the initiative to participate in the recycling profession. They withstood the scorching sun and cold wind and did not even frown upon the toilsome and dirty tasks. Every day, they drove the recycling truck around to collect truckloads of waste and then separated and sold the materials for money. Although sometimes an entire truck of waste did not sell for much, it was how they slowly accumulated funds. Finally, they could establish a university for the world and merits and wisdom for themselves.

In addition, Fo Guang Shan has a branch temple named Fu Shan Temple in central Taiwan. Devotees took ten years of funds accumulated from recycling materials to build the temple.

On the surface, recycling and separating trash seem like solitary acts, but as long as more people participate, a group of people will become a mutual support system. Recycling was originally a way of cherishing one's blessings and a way of environmental preservation. Establishing universities and constructing temples with funds raised from recycling materials gives even greater meaning to the dual cultivation of merit and wisdom.

The dual cultivation of merit and wisdom is Buddhist cultivation. Cherishing and caring for

things are beautiful Chinese virtues. Traditional moral principles and concepts have always had the awareness of environmental preservation that is established through cherishing. For instance, as a child, parents would often tell me, “A person can only use 3.5 liters of water per day.” Beyond that, you will be overdrawing your merits!

Merits are like a savings account. Only if you make deposits can you then make withdrawals. Similarly, as long as we treasure various great natural resources and do not let them diminish, humanity can continue to live on earth.

Originally, cherishing and caring for things were beautiful virtues in life. However, society nowadays is rich in materials. Many people are used to being extravagantly wasteful with no moderation of food and drink, no restraint in wasting and discarding, recklessly wasting natural resources, and not knowing how to cherish resources.

There was an Asian student studying in Germany. He rented a room at an elderly man’s place. The room’s facilities were complete with air conditioning, bedding, furniture, and lighting. Every time the student went out, he always left the light and air conditioning on. The landlord told him, “Young man,

you need to save energy. When you aren't using the light, please turn it off." This young student believed that he paid rent, so he had the right to use the facilities. Disagreeing, he said, "What business is it of yours?" The elderly man said, "Young man, these are the energy resources of our country. Every person living in Germany should protect the country's energy resources. If everyone doesn't save energy, you are wasting, and we are all wasting. If our country's energy resources decrease, the country will become poor, then it will be difficult for everyone to live."

Character should be cherished as it is the root of wealth; a grain of rice should be cherished as it is the source of fortune; a few words should be discreet as it is the base of merit; small lives should be protected as they are the essence of longevity. Nothing in the world is easy to come by. Thus, we have to know how to cherish everything. If we decrease the amount of waste and overconsumption in our lives, not only are we cherishing our merits, we are also helping the country and society save energy. This is the actualization of environmental preservation.

According to a report, humanity is currently consuming natural resources at a rapid pace. Combining that with the population growth rate of the entire

world, in no more than fifty years, we may need two earths to fulfill humanity's need for natural resources.

This warning tells us that we are already facing a serious energy crisis. Thus, energy saving and preserving the environment requires everyone's effort. Most importantly, everyone should foster habits at home and work and practice environmental preservation in life. For instance, "Work when the sun rises, rest when the sun sets." A disciplined life is eating and using a suitable amount of things. Buying too much and not using what you buy is a waste. Go out regularly to breathe fresh air. Do not stay at home in the air conditioning watching television. Not only is that a waste of electricity, it will not benefit one's health either.

Air conditioning and freezers that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, in addition to cars and motorcycles that emit carbon dioxide, are some of the main causes of climate change. Thus, when going out, if our destination is close by, we should take a walk or ride a bicycle. If it is far, then we should take public transit. If we drive, we should try to carpool and have the car checked and maintained regularly, so it will not emit black smoke. All of these can reduce carbon emissions and pollution.

Additionally, to avoid pollution, we should decrease pollution and be active in preventing pollution. Everyone should manage toxic waste consciously and with safety. Of course, if science and technology can invent objects for humanity that will not harm nature and can be recycled readily as a renewable energy source, then that will certainly be the ultimate way.

In addition, we can practice environmental preservation in our daily lives through fostering the habit of turning off lights when we leave an area. Even before sleeping, we can unplug the computer, television, and other home appliances not in use to save electricity. Other things can be done, like not wasting daily supplies, such as tissue paper, paper cups, chopsticks, and so on. When you go shopping, buy things that can last, such as china teacups, cutlery, and a shaver that can change blades rather than disposable items.

Most household items can be bought in bulk at wholesalers, or you can buy a big box of concentrated detergent that can be diluted. Try to decrease packaging waste, and prioritize choosing glass and metal cans that can be recycled. In addition, you can organize an advocacy group requesting local stores and markets to decrease the use of packaging and plastics.

At the workplace, try to recycle disposable items, such as envelopes, memo pads, photocopied paper, newspaper, paper boxes, aluminum cans, glass bottles, plastic, X-ray film, batteries, iron wires, lead, iron, bronze items, and so on. You can use email to replace letters. You can adopt the circulation of a notice or memorandum to decrease the amount of photocopies. Documents can be printed on both sides of the paper to decrease the waste of paper. Donate unused household items and office equipment to organizations in need. These are all practical ways to put environmental preservation into action.

Many years ago, there was a Japanese Minister of the Environment who suggested that men should not wear a suit and tie to work during summer because they would then have to sit in the air conditioning to keep cool, which is a waste of energy. Thus, it can be seen that most people are already aware of the limited energy resources that one should not wantonly waste. If every person is aware of environmental preservation and earnestly carries it out, then our earth will definitely be able to rest and gradually return to its original state. The crisis of human existence will also be resolved and disappear.

## V. Conclusion

In *The One Hundred Parables Sutra*, there is a story about a parrot that extinguishes a fire.

A forest was on fire. A parrot carried water in its mouth to put out the fire. How much water can such a small parrot hold in one mouthful? How can a parrot transporting small mouthfuls of water put out an entire forest fire? This simply was not possible. But the parrot was oblivious to that and still spared no effort in carrying mouthfuls of water.

At this time, Celestial King Indra came to the parrot's side and asked him, "You are just a small parrot. How is it possible to put out such a large wild forest fire with your capability?"

The parrot replied, "Whether the huge fire can be put out, I don't know. However, since I am a member of this forest, I must save the place that I live in. I need to try my best."

Because of the parrot's great vow, King Indra was deeply touched, and said, "Although you are a small parrot, you have a great, compassionate mind and vow. Let me help you."

Using his supernatural power, King Indra stopped the forest fire in a moment.

Today's earth is facing climate change, melting glaciers, a hole in the ozone layer, a lack of water sources, and various other problems. Some people cannot help but doubt, "With our little bit of strength, how much can we help? How can I save this earth?"

Actually, this is not a problem. More important is asking: does one have the heart? As the saying goes, "The Buddha spoke all the Dharma to remedy all minds; if no such minds exist, then what is the use of all the Dharma?" If everyone has the heart and wishes to save the earth and thinks, "The earth is sick. I want to help and not let it worsen," then the calamities of the earth will not be a problem, just like the saying, "Take such measures as the situation calls for."

In other words, environmental preservation must be a long-term battle. It is a campaign that is beyond race and crosses borders. Today, as members of the global village, we are all responsible for caring for the continuous existence of it. The Dharma clearly explains that sentient and non-sentient beings all exist: "Because there is this, there is that. If this is not, then that will not be." Thus, we coexist as one, and within the continuous flow of change, even something as tiny as a speck of dust has a subtle

relationship with the environment. While there is no doubt that we should strive to eliminate the dust from our minds and change them, we must also raise people's awareness and take action to preserve the external environment. Not only is the 21st century the era of environmentalism, it will also be a beautiful era of purified minds.

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