

The Upanishads are considered to be one of the earlier texts of Hindu religion that discuss topics related to philosophy. A small number of of the many topics that the Isha Upanishad, the shortest of the Upanishads, discusses deals with philosophy, religion, and ritualism. The Isha Upanishad conveys how “the entire universe is to be looked upon as the Lord.” Hinduism emphasizes how God created Earth and everything on it (including us). Once you believe all life to be sacred and how we are all children of Mother Earth, your behavior and desires change, balancing our individual needs and desires with those of the extended family of life.

During the earliest, formative period of their society, Hindus first perceived God's presence around them through nature. The philosophers of the Upanishads teach that Brahman, the supreme universal spirit, cannot be seen or heard but whose nature can be known through the doctrine of self-knowledge. Ancient Hindus felt Brahman's presence in everything around them. Since these divine forces sustained all living creatures and organic things on this earth, to please God, they felt they must live in harmony with His creation including earth, rivers, forests, sun, air, and mountains. This belief spawned many rituals that are still followed by traditional Hindus in India.

The classic sacrificial fire is a form of worship offered to a particular deity. The chanting of mantras accompanied with the burning of fire and incense help remove the pollution and other materials from the environment with beneficial properties. It may be performed individually or collectively for a better effect on environment. In 2011, scientists have discovered a 4,000 year old fire ritual conducted in the remote village in Kerala in April this year has a positive impact on the atmosphere, soil and other environment effects. The ritual seems to have accelerated the process of seed germination and also the microbial presence in air, water and soil in and around the region of the fire ritual is vastly diminished (“Ancient fire ritual has positive impact on environment” ).

The universe was created by God, and because of this, we must honour the universe in all its parts. Animals and plants, mountains and rivers, all form part of the earth, and many are worshipped for the noble qualities they possess. Cows, for example are so highly revered that killing them is banned and those that no longer produce milk are retired, not slaughtered and special sanctuaries have been created for them. Trees are treated with great respect because it is the most important type of plant life and, like all living things, have a

soul (“Hinduism: beliefs about care of the planet”). The Mahabharata states that “even if there is only one tree full of flowers and fruits in a village, that place becomes worth of worship and respect.” Karma teaches us that resources in the world become scarce because people use them for their own ends. People should use the world unselfishly in order to maintain the natural balance and to repay God for the gifts he has given. The Bhagavad Gita documents Krishna’s battlefield discussion with Arjun that encompasses what the eternal message of spiritual wisdom states: “...the gods will give you the food of your desire. Whoso enjoys their gift, yet gives nothing, is a thief, no more or less.”

In India, Hindus are playing more of an active part in checking government schemes which might damage the environment, such as the building of large-scale dams which could cause the rivers to flood, destroying precious land and animals. Sometimes laws are established to protect the environment. The Bhaktivedanta Manor, a dairy farm in London, has developed a revolutionary model for compassionate, environmentally sustainable and low-carbon dairy farming. Because cows are considered useless and unnecessary, when they stop producing milk they get slaughtered. But at the Bhaktivedanta they manage their cattle herd in a virtually unique and modern way: No cows, bulls or oxen are killed at all; all cows are hand-milked; cows suckle from their mothers; and bulls are given work (McDermott, “All of Existence Should Be Revered”). At the end of the animals' working life they are kept on the farm and cared for until they die a natural death.

Hindu groups have also advocated the government and people to clean up environmental pollution – especially in the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. They have put pressure on the politicians to take this issue seriously. The key point I think being made when it comes to the environment, that people forget, is that distorted view of ownership. They consider their home *their* home but the street it is not ours – therefore we do not need to take care of it. But Hinduism tries to stress that street, that forest, those cows are yours. Until this type of relationship gets established, awareness and action about pollution will not be successful.

This Hindu prayer called Shanti path recited to conclude every Hindu ceremony, reflect the Hindus' connectedness with nature: “There is peace in heavenly region; there is peace in the environment; the water is cooling; herbs are healing; the plants are peace-giving; there is harmony in the celestial objects and perfection

in knowledge; everything in the universe is peaceful; peace pervades everywhere. May that peace come to me!”(Hinduism and Environment: The forgotten basic).

Hindus believed that humans, gods and nature were integral parts of one 'organic whole'. Modern Hindus have forgotten their ancestors' view on ecology, and have acquired the western exploitative attitude towards nature. Lush forests have been cut down and rivers have become polluted with industrial wastes. Delhi has become one of the most polluted cities in the world. This devastation is taking place in the name of *progress*. The Indian environment-protection movement opposing this ecological destruction, is run by westernized elites, and based on western model. It has failed to become a mass movement, for it is devoid of spiritual foundation or content necessary to inspire Hindus.

What is needed today is to remind ourselves that nature cannot be destroyed without mankind ultimately being destroyed itself. With nuclear weapons representing the ultimate pollutant, threatening to convert this beautiful planet of ours into a scorched cinder unable to support even the most primitive life forms, mankind is finally forced to face its dilemma. Centuries of exploiting the environment have finally caught up with us and a radically changed attitude towards nature is now not a question of spiritual merit but of sheer survival (Singh, “The Hindu Declaration on Nature”).

Putting aside the need for more people to take responsibility in caring for the Earth, there have been wonderful strides made by the United States government in protecting the environment. The Bhumi Project's Green Temple campaign was launched in Washington D.C. on August 2011 and it demonstrates an international initiative to encourage Hindu temples from around the world to be greener. The initiative is to help develop temple gardens, increase recycling initiatives, green festivals and gatherings, and encourage green options for travel to and from temples (“Bhumi Green Temple initiative receives White House launch”). Sometimes the best way to accomplish something is to start small; start within your neighborhood and community, and then the word can spread (through conversations or the internet and media) to a point where national attention is acknowledged.

This is how democracy works in the modern age. Everyone has a duty to advise the leaders, through voting, writing letters and encouraging everyone to do the same. If everyone were to vote according to conscience and duty rather than self interest, and leaders act likewise, then democracy would prevail. So, you

have seen how Hindus should respect the environment and how your actions speak louder than your words; so we all should all aspire to carry out positive reform. Through democracy we all share the duty of leadership. Thus it is our duty to support protection of the environment through our governments. In addition to government action, individual action is also important. I don't believe I have to argue this point. Hinduism has always supported moderation and avoiding excessive consumption. Gandhi once stated that "There is enough for everyone's need, but not for their greed." Add to that the duty to protect nature and the environment and the required action is clear.

All living beings are sacred because they are parts of God, and can be reincarnated into any form of life. Hinduism is full of stories that treat animals as divine, such as how Krishna used to herd cows, or how the monkey Hanuman was a faithful servant of the Rama. Most Hindus are vegetarian because of this belief in the sanctity of life. Even trees, rivers and mountains are believed to have souls, and should be honoured and cared for.

The virtue of a simple life has always been prized in Hindu society. Brahmans are advised to live on the charity of others and not accumulate too much wealth. The most highly respected person in Hindu society is the sadhu, or sage who lives outside normal society, in forests or caves, or travels on foot from one town to another. Sadhus take pride in living simply and consuming as little as possible ("What does Hinduism teach us about ecology?").

Hinduism stresses that true happiness comes from within and not from outer possessions. This means that the search for material possessions, and the consumption of materials and energy it brings, should not be allowed to dominate life. Life's main purpose is to discover the spiritual nature and the peace and fulfillment it brings. The efforts to exploit the things of this world are considered by Hindus to be a distraction from this central purpose of life.

"Mother Earth supports us with Her abundant endowments and riches; it is She who nourishes us; it is She who provides us with a sustainable environment; and it is She who, when angered by the misdeeds of Her children, punishes them with disasters." -*Artharva Veda*