



INTERFAITH
RAINFOREST
INITIATIVE

A BUDDHIST TOOLKIT ON FOREST PROTECTION

RESOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS
LEADERS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is part of a series developed by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative meant to inform and inspire faith communities to action to help safeguard tropical forests and their inhabitants. The Initiative believes the time has come for a worldwide movement for the care of tropical forests, one that is grounded in the inherent value of forests, and inspired by the values, ethics, and moral guidance of indigenous peoples and faith communities.

This Buddhist Toolkit presents a series of reflections, verses, prayers, talking points, and lesson plans aimed at Buddhist practitioners, and assembled with the help of XXX. It is not meant to be exhaustive or final, but represents a living document that can evolve over time with the help and for the benefit of faith communities.

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an international, multi-faith alliance that is working to bring moral urgency and faith-based leadership to efforts to end tropical deforestation. It is a platform for religious leaders and faith communities to work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, governments, NGOs and businesses on actions that protect rainforest and the rights of those that serve as their guardians.

QUESTIONS?

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is eager to work with you to protect tropical forests and the rights of indigenous peoples. Contact us at info@interfaithrainforest.org.

PARTNERS

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative welcomes engagement by all organizations, institutions and individuals of good faith and conscience that are committed to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of rainforests.



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OPENING REFLECTION

BUDDHISM, HUMAN NATURE AND TROPICAL RAINFOREST CONSERVATION

Forests have played a role in Buddhist life and practices over millennia. History provides many examples of this. Queen Māyā of Sakya gave birth to Prince Siddhatta Gotama, the Buddha, under a sal tree (some sources say it was an ashoka tree, *saraca asoca*) in a garden in Lumbini, Nepal. The Buddha spent extended time in forests around South Asia. He was enlightened under a sacred fig tree, passed away and ascended in the Sala Grove, which was rich with sal trees in the vicinity of Kusinara (now Kushinigar, India).

The Buddha's teachings were anchored in a principle that materialism would not bring happiness, and that attachment to material objects is a characteristic of human suffering. The Buddha identified three fundamental unwholesome roots (*akusala-mūla*), known in Mahayana Buddhism as the three poisons: *lōbha* (greed), *dōsa* (hatred) and *mōha* (delusion) which are also at the center of the environmental crisis. The crisis we are facing now is fundamentally spiritual in nature. We mistakenly believe that material acquisition will bring fulfillment. This false belief drives our desire to accumulate material wealth at the expense of nature. However, the wealth acquired cannot fulfill the feeling of what is lacking in our lives. The sense of lack will disappear only when we attain inner peace and live in harmony with the natural world.

In ancient Buddhist scriptures such as the Dhammapada and Vanaropa Sutta, the importance of living in harmony with nature, planting trees, and the merits of those who protect the trees are stressed:

“As the bee derives honey from the flower without harming its colour or fragrance, so should the wise interact with their surroundings.” – (Dhammapada 49)

“One day a deity asked the Buddha, “Whose merit grows day and night, who is the righteous, virtuous person that goes to the realm of bliss?” Answered the Buddha, the merit of those people who plant groves, parks, build bridges, make ponds, dwelling places, etc. grows day and night, and such religious persons go to heaven.” – (Discourse on the Merit Gained in Planting Groves, Vanaropa Sutta)

Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia have engaged their theological teachings and traditions to stop rapid deforestation in the region. In the 1990s, Buddhist monks in Thailand began to raise public awareness about forest conservation. The most visible manifestation of an ecological dhamma was the practice of ordaining trees in Thailand. To this day, Thai people will not cut forests near the forest monasteries. Under the monastic rules, monks themselves are prohibited from cutting living plants; and villagers respect forests as a place of monastic refuge and conservation. Buddhist practice is often quite localized and community-based with some of the challenges to the environment shaped by policy-makers and political decisions. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist leaders have engaged directly with the Parliament and the Presidency to develop a new village of sustainability.

Buddhism is a doctrine of liberation that offers solutions, and practical measures for seeing the consequences of our actions, mastering our own desires, and developing a more sustainable, generous and mindful approach to life on Earth. Buddhism teaches in a practical way that purifying the mind and acting for the greater good by reducing harm and suffering is what gives us a sense of peace and satisfaction in life. According to Buddhism, we all need to live the “right way,” which means respecting ourselves and our planet. In this way we are happier, the rain forest is happier, and the world will breathe more easily.

TALKING POINTS

REFRAINING FROM KILLING, RESPECTING PRECIOUS HUMAN LIFE, RECOGNIZING THE SUFFERING OF DEFORESTATION, EXAMINING OUR ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES, EMBRACING INTERDEPENDENCE

1. Refraining from killing.

In Buddhism, the Five Precepts (pañca sila) form a basic code of morality to guide human actions. The first precept is to refrain from killing living beings. Since deforestation involves the destruction of many beings, it violates the spirit of the first precept. As Lily de Silva writes, “The well-known Five Precepts (pañca sila) form the minimum code of ethics that every lay Buddhist is expected to adhere to. Its first precept involves abstention from injury to life. It is explained as the casting aside of all forms of weapons, being conscientious about depriving a living being of life. In its positive sense, it means the cultivation of compassion and sympathy for all living things.” (“The Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature”, by Lily de Silva. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/desilva/attitude.html>.)

2. Respecting our precious human life.

Buddhists recognize the preciousness of human life and the opportunities for freedom and realization it offers. However, respecting our human existence is not only about living independently. In fact, we are intrinsically linked with other beings through interdependence. Our environment—specifically the rainforests and other natural resources such as water, biodiversity and complex ecosystems—supply us with warmth, shelter, food, and medicines. At a more global level they produce oxygen, sustaining a healthy atmosphere as the “lungs of the planet.” Respecting our precious life means appreciating this dependence on other beings for our very existence, and sustaining this healthy interdependence for the well-being of all.

3. Recognizing the suffering associated with deforestation.

Suffering of beings is inherent in the act of deforestation, both as the loss of life and the destruction of habitat. There are also life-threatening risks to indigenous peoples, forest communities and environmental activists who act to protect the forest. Almost 1000 environmental defenders have been killed since 2010. We need to address this violence and give our support as a Buddhist community.

4. Examining our actions and their consequences (karma).

We should reflect on our role—whether direct or indirect—in the destruction of rainforests. We must become aware of the extent to which our actions contribute to the causes of deforestation. We should honestly reflect on the effects of these actions on our environment, on the global community, and on future generations. Being aware of our actions and their consequences is the basis of keeping the Five Precepts and minimizing the suffering we cause.

5. Embracing interdependence.

We depend on countless beings for our support and livelihood. In the context of rainforests, we are especially dependent on indigenous peoples to be the guardians of these tropical forests. As a Buddhist community (sangha), we can participate in the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative to support indigenous forest peoples. By doing so we not only act to protect the rainforests and forest communities from destruction, but we benefit our own communities and future generations as well.

PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

To cultivate love and compassion towards all beings, practicing Buddhists will do a meditation such as the following several times a day:

May I be free from sorrow and always happy.

May those who desire welfare

Be free from sorrow and always happy.

May those who are indifferent towards me

Be free from sorrow and always happy.

May those who hate me be free from

Sorrow and always happy.

May all beings who live in this city

Be free from sorrow and always happy.

May all beings who live elsewhere be

Free from sorrow and always happy.

May all beings who live anywhere in

The world be free from sorrow and

Always happy.

May all beings living in every

Galaxy and each element of life in

Each of those systems be happy,

Having achieved the highest bliss.

Whatever beings there are:

Timid, strong, and all other,

Tiny or huge,

Long, average, or short,

Seen or unseen,

Living near or far,

Born or coming to birth,

May all these beings have

Happy and healthy minds.

Let no one deceive another,

Nor despise anyone anywhere.

Neither in anger nor ill-will

Should one wish another harm.

As a mother would risk

Her own life to protect

Her only child,

So should one cultivate

A boundless heart

Towards all living beings.

Let our love pervade the whole world,

Without any obstructions,

Above, below, and across.

Khuddaka-Patha 232-35, translated by Elmer Smith, 1915. As cited in Harvey B. Aronson, Love and Sympathy in Theravada Buddhism (Delhi: Motilala Bararsidass), pp.49-50.

VERSES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE

By Robert Aitken

Waking up in the morning
I vow with all beings
to be ready for sparks of the Dharma
from flowers or children or birds.

Sitting alone in zazen
I vow with all beings
to remember I'm sitting together
with mountains, children, and bears.

Looking up at the sky
I vow with all beings
to remember this infinite ceiling
in every room of my life.

When I stroll around in the city
I vow with all beings
to notice how lichen and grasses
never give up in despair.

Watching a spider at work
I vow with all beings
to cherish the web of the universe:
touch one point and everything moves.

Preparing the garden for seeds
I vow with all beings
to nurture the soil to be fertile
each spring for the next 1000 years.

When people praise me for something
I vow with all beings
to return to my vegetable garden
and give credit where credit is due.

With tropical forests in danger
I vow with all beings
to raise hell with the people responsible
and slash my consumption of trees.

With resources scarcer and scarcer
I vow with all beings
to consider the law of proportion:
my have is another's have-not.

Watching gardeners label their plants
I vow with all beings
to practice the old horticulture
and let plants identify me.

Hearing the crickets at night
I vow with all beings
to keep my practice as simple –
just over and over again.

Falling asleep at last
I vow with all beings
to enjoy the dark and the silence
and rest in the vast unknown.

Published in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, ed. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2000), pp. 471-473.

A HOMAGE FROM THE TREES TO THE ELEMENTS

By Lillian Sum

E ma ho!

How beautiful is the earth, water, fire, air and space.

In all the directions, we dedicate

All our goodness and transform what is not pure to become

Of an essence like pure nectar – something that nourishes us to our core.

Our corpses cannot bring any gifts without breathing in and out.

We stand straight up and sit down firm, taking the earth as our foundation.

Roots take us beyond this modern time into ancestral microbes from eons past.

Realizations run deep... transformed and stored, the carbon of the past,

Until now we are still guarding the ecosystems surrounding us.

Yet we have heard crashing and burning of our dear beloved community.

In the distance, we don't know when, but soon our heritage will be gone.

Roots are being torn from the place where we have lived and belonged.

We communicate to you, please hear our cries.

We have done our best; we need you to make a stand,

To be fearless and use the power of wisdom,

To show resilience to what the atmosphere has become.

Regenerate, restore, alleviate the sufferings of these times.

My branches reach high into the sky,

My leaves transform and photosynthesize,

My fruits and medicine are provided for all who listen to what I offer.

Calling the sun, moon, clouds and rain to come forth,

Yet sheltering all who need protection from extremes.

I dedicate these heartfelt whispers from my core to bring awareness to each

That hears this, reads it out loud.

May it bring some blessings from the forests.

That ancient wisdom is what guides us to do what is right

For the benefit of all beings.

We must Act Now!

INVOCATION FOR EARTH RELIEF CEREMONY

By Rochester Zen Center

Tonight we have offered candles, incense, fruit and tea,

Chanted sutras and dharani,

Whatever merit comes to us from these offerings

We now return to the Earth, sea and sky.

May our air be left pure!

May our waters be clean!

May our Earth be restored!

May all beings attain Buddhahood!

Published in Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism, ed. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2000), p.444.

LESSON PLAN

SITTING WITHIN THE TREES: BUDDHISTS PROTECTING TROPICAL FORESTS

A lesson plan for religious leaders and facilitators

By Adam Lobel

Notes to facilitator:

- **Time:** This lesson plan is for a 60-minute session. It could also be extended into a full-day workshop or series of classes, or it could be shortened into a 30-minute presentation. Shorten by removing the meditation, dyads, and closing circle.
- **Audience:** This lesson plan is designed for Buddhists, for people interested in Buddhism and meditation, and for interfaith audiences who are curious about Buddhist responses to ecological issues.
- **Facilitation:** It is recommended to contemplate the lesson plan and put it in your own words, rather than simply reading from the plan.
- **Traditional Themes:** We emphasize the 4 Noble Truths in relation to ecology and the teaching of interdependence, or dependent origination (Pāli: paṭiccasamuppāda, Sanskrit: pratītyasamutpāda).
- **Method:** The session will be experiential, interactive, and will also provide information and content. We find that personal experience will stay with an audience longer than simply presenting content. We aspire for a lasting, heartfelt shift in understanding and action.
- **Communication:** According to research from the report: “Faith and Climate Change: A Guide to Talking with the Five Major Religions,” it is clear that Buddhists respond well to the following themes: interconnectedness, balance, right action, Earth-care as an ethical challenge, the imperative to wake up, and the concept of a journey or path.
- **Make this personal!** This lesson plan is meant to inspire and is a resource. Please do not feel constrained by it. Make it your own; use examples and practices that are meaningful to you. Before leading, take time to contemplate your own relationship with tropical forests and indigenous communities. Have you spent time in meditation in forests? Are you aware of the extent of devastating deforestation? Is that awareness part of your practice and leadership? Have you let your heart break for what we are losing?... If your presentation comes from this heartfelt experience, it will be powerful.

Educational Goals:

- To make a clear connection between Buddhist teachings and the protection of forests and the indigenous people who live in good relationship with these forests.
- To educate Buddhists about deforestation and its impacts.
- To offer an educational or transformative experience that will stay with participants.
- To offer simple suggestions for:
 - a. working with the emotional impact of ecological destruction;
 - b. including the forests and living earth in our daily practice.
- To inspire small and large action to protect forests.

Overview and Suggested Timing:

Welcome and setting intention	(5 minutes)
Opening meditation	(5 minutes)
Part I: Buddhism, Interdependence, and Ecology	(10 minutes)
Part II: Interdependence with Tropical Forests	(10 minutes)
Part III: Practicing Protection and Reverence	(10 minutes)
	(Small group activity: 15 minutes)
Closing Aspirations and Circle	(5 minutes, or more if possible)

Space and Atmosphere:

Note to facilitator: We suggest arranging chairs or cushions in a circle if possible. If not, create as intimate a space as possible. You may choose to display posters, photographs, maps, and images of the forest or maps of deforestation. You may choose to play natural sounds from the rainforest as people gather and enter the space. Here is a free resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=964&v=9hWgA7qjK2c or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SynzKC4fWp0>

Welcome and Setting Intention (5 Minutes):

- Welcome
- The intention: to experientially explore the interconnection between Buddhist teachings and the painful reality of deforestation. We also bring awareness to the indigenous communities who live in good relationship with forests, whose ways of life are interdependent with the trees, animals, plants, and natural balance.
- Note: depending on size of audience, you could ask people to say their names and what has brought them to this event.
- Optional exercise: Open Sentences (drawn from Joanna Macy's *The work that reconnects*)
Ask for a few random voices of participants to verbally complete this open sentence:
"When I think about the destruction of tropical forests what I feel is..." (hear some responses)
Thank the audience and proceed to meditation.

Opening Meditation:

- As we explore the beauty and richness of tropical forests and the pain of deforestation and the destruction of indigenous ways of life, we will invite our hearts to open.
- This can arouse a range of emotions: sadness, despair, guilt, anger, blame, being overwhelmed, and sometimes numbness. It is also common to not feel anything at all.
- As Buddhist practitioners, we recognize these as mental events. We can allow them to arise within a space of awareness. We do not have to attach to these emotions, nor do we need to fight them. Rather, we see them with insight and mindfulness.
- Our purpose today is not to be guilty, but to live with open eyes and hearts.
- To help us be present and skillfully work with these emotions, we will now practice silent meditation for a few minutes.

Ring gong. Lead a guided awareness of the breath:

- Take a stable and relaxed seated posture.
- Close your eyes if this feels comfortable to you.
- Feel that your body is supported by the Earth.
- Attend to the breath flowing in and out.
- Let go of past and future and relax in the present.
- If your mind wanders, return to the flow of breath.

Pause for a few minutes

- Know that the oxygen you are breathing comes in large part from the breath of the trees and forests of our world.
- As you breathe, feel your living interconnection with forests.
- If the forests are destroyed, there will be no oxygen, no breath.
- You and the forests are sharing the same breath.
- Enjoy this interdependence of all life.

Pause for a few minutes and ring gong.

Part I: Buddhism, Interdependence, and Ecology (10 minutes)

- Having settled into the present, we will now explore some basic aspects of the relationship between Buddhist teachings and the protection of tropical forests.
- As we know, the Buddhist teachings can be summarized in Four Noble Truths:
 - a. The Truth of Suffering
 - b. The Truth of the Cause of Suffering (craving)
 - c. The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering
 - d. The Truth of the Path

- **In summary:** the Buddha diagnosed our human situation as one of suffering, he stated that this suffering comes from craving rooted in ignorance, he then stated that this suffering can indeed come to an end, and then he offered a concrete path to bring an end to suffering.
- In this way, Buddhism is always about understanding suffering and it provides a myriad of methods to bring suffering to an end.
- But the Buddha only shows the way, we have to walk that way in our lives.

- **The Four Noble Truths can be applied to ecology and the destruction of forests:**

“The four noble truths provide a framework for diagnosing our current situation and formulating appropriate guidelines — because the threats and disasters we face ultimately stem from the human mind, and therefore require profound changes within our minds. If personal suffering stems from craving and ignorance — from the three poisons of greed, ill will, and delusion — the same applies to the suffering that afflicts us on a collective scale. Our ecological emergency is a larger version of the perennial human predicament. Both as individuals and as a species, we suffer from a sense of self that feels disconnected not only from other people but from the Earth itself. As Thich Nhat Hanh has said, “We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.” We need to wake up and realize that the Earth is our mother as well as our home — and in this case, the umbilical cord binding us to her cannot be severed. When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her.”

Excerpt From: “The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change”
(ecobuddhism.org)

- The ecological crisis means that in order to awaken, we must realize the radical interconnection between ourselves and all things. Our practical situation on Earth as a Buddhist today means to attend to ecological suffering, to understand its causes, and to be on a journey to bring those causes to an end.
- One of the basic teachings for overcoming ignorance and suffering is to understand *interdependence*, or *dependent* origination.
- Our lives, and all life, are inextricably interconnected. A web of all things. It is a misunderstanding to live in separation. This is the delusion of the separate self.
- The Buddhist path to awakening deconstructs the sense of separation through meditation, insight, and ethical living.
- This will mean a profound transformation of individual lives and our social systems. It will mean living from complete interrelationship with our planet.

Part II: Interdependence with Tropical Forests (10 Minutes)

- The teaching of interdependence can sometimes seem abstract; the timescale of interrelationship can be too vast and difficult to see.
- One of the opportunities that comes with a global ecological crisis is that it makes the Buddha’s teachings very immediate and tangible.

- Forests are a perfect example:
 - a. Positively: because of the ways in which we literally depend on the thriving forests for our lives.
 - b. Negatively: because deforestation is slowly and painfully teaching us the truth of interdependence.
- Forests have a deep and longstanding meaning within Buddhism. It was under the Bodhi tree that Buddha awakened. It was within a grove of Sal trees where he passed away. Bodhi trees are Buddhist pilgrimage sites, and the forest remains an important retreat for meditation.
- When we see forests from the deluded/habitual perspective of separation, we ignore the radical interdependence they manifest:
 - a. Within the natural processes of the forests themselves;
 - b. Between human beings and the forests;
 - c. Between the forests and the entire living planet.

From the perspective of ecological science:

- “Tropical forests are the richest and most diverse expression of life that has evolved on Earth. They are complex and fragile ecosystems with webs of interlocking, interdependent relationships between diverse plant and animal species and their nonliving environment. Tropical forests approximate the primeval forest biomes from which they originally evolved and contain more than half of the world’s 10 to 20 million or more species of plants and animals. Worldwide, approximately 1.5 million species are presently recorded” (Daniel H. Henning, 1991. Tropical forest values of protected areas. In: Tiger Paper FAO. October–December: 1–9.)
- Tropical forests absorb about 30 percent of human-made global greenhouse gas emissions.
- They can be likened to the lungs of the living Earth.
- As carbon emissions into the atmosphere continue to increase, we will need more, not less tropical forests.
- Yet, tropical forests are disappearing within our lifetimes.
- According to the scientists at Global Forest Watch, Humans destroyed 12 million hectares (30 million acres) of tropical forest in 2018. Almost a third of the lost forest last year was pristine rainforest — we are destroying our own lungs.
- Due to increased temperatures and droughts as a result of climate disruption, the forests can also add carbon to the air.
- So as Buddhists, we need not only to protect the forests, but also to help them thrive and return to their natural cycles.
- As a concrete example of interdependent relationship, deforestation is a cause of suffering and we must work to bring this suffering to an end.
- Yet for most of us, this might seem impossible and hard to fit in our lives.
- We may instead prefer to meditate and ignore the situation.
- Yet the Buddhist way is to see suffering clearly and bring it to an end through compassion, skill, and wisdom.

Note to facilitator: Ask the audience to pause, close their eyes, and notice what they are feeling. Play the sounds of the rainforest during the contemplation. Ask, slowly, each question:

- What emotions are present?...
- Do you feel an interrelationship between the Buddhist teachings and deforestation?...
- Have you allowed yourself space and time to grieve and feel the loss of the forests?...
- What would support you in remaining open and aware of the death of the forests?...

Part III: Practicing Protection and Reverence (10 Minutes)

- Many of the economic and cultural systems in which we are embedded are based on separation: separate selves and desires.
For middle class households, this may mean each adult has their own car and each member of the household their own cell phone, laptop, and other electronic gadgets. Beyond this, we each have our own sense of identity, expressed in our own style, consumer desires, and associated products.
- From the perspective of this separation, the forests are a mere resource to be consumed for economic drives. From the perspective of separation, it may seem that destroying forests will only have a limited impact and may produce quick wealth and resources.
But if we think about the global economy as a whole, we realize that corporations based in the Global North are gaining profits at the expense of communities and ecosystems in the Global South.
- Part of compassionate awareness of interdependence is to understand that the individual farmers and large industries are also embedded in complex conditions that encourage and reward this ecological destruction. We are all embedded in these eco-cidal systems and we can develop compassion for everyone in the system, including farmers forced into situations where they have almost no choice but to slash and burn.
- But from the perspective of interdependence, the destruction of tropical forests causes almost irreparable harm. From the perspective of interdependence, we see that we are entangled in relationship with each tree and each biome. From the perspective of interdependence and selflessness, it is almost impossible to allow for the destruction of tropical forests. It would be akin to cutting off parts of our own body.

Examples and Inspiration from Ecological Forest Monks

- We are not alone in this practice of protecting forests and can find inspiration from other Buddhists. There is an established Buddhist tradition of revering and ordaining trees in Thailand. As capitalist practices destroyed many Asian tropical forests and their rich biodiversity, monks established a practice of wrapping a saffron robe around a tree to say: “this tree is sacred and should be revered and protected just as we protect the life of a monk.”

In her essay, “The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand,” Susan M. Darlington wrote that Buddhists “see their religion as critical for providing practical as well as moral guidelines for ecological conservation.”

- The “ecology monks” are those actively engaged in environmental and conservation activities and who respond to the suffering which environmental degradation causes. A major aim of Buddhism is to relieve suffering, the root causes of which are greed, ignorance, and hatred. The monks see the destruction of the forests, pollution of the air and water, and other environmental problems as ultimately caused by people acting through these evils, motivated by economic gain and the material benefits of development, industrialization, and consumerism. As monks, they believe it is their duty to take action against these evils. Their actions bring them into the realm of political and economic debates, especially concerning the rapid development of the Thai economy and control of natural resources.

Note to facilitator: Could show images or video of Thai monks ordaining trees.

- As Buddhists, there is a call to wake up to this truth with compassion and wisdom. As we meditate, study, and practice ethical livelihood, we can begin to feel and live from this interrelationship with the forests.
- From a Buddhist perspective, there is a moral obligation to affirm the living value and beauty of forests in their own right, and to deeply understand and revere their role in the thriving of life on Earth. Each breath we take is in intimate interrelationship with these trees, animals, and plants.

Communities of the Tropical Forest

- Buddhists can further learn from indigenous peoples in forested regions. Having developed ways of life in direct relation with the cycles, trees, roots, vines, flowers, insects and all non-human animals of the forests, indigenous peoples exemplify thriving-with forests, rather than thriving through eliminating them.

Indigenous people revere the forest that, until the present, has protected them from outsiders and given them everything they need. They live what is called a sustainable existence, meaning they use the land without doing harm to the plants and animals that also call the rainforest their home. As a wise indigenous man once said, “the Earth is our historian, our educator, the provider of food, medicine, clothing and protection. She is the mother of our races.” For many indigenous people the rainforest is the foundation of their spiritual life: Where all plants and animals contain their own spirits, where all living things are connected and where humans are part of a wider community of forest life.” Indigenous peoples manage over half of the world’s lands and forests and have deep and historical connections to the land. Unfortunately, inadequate recognition and protection of indigenous people’s rights puts forests at risks and often leads to conflict and deforestation. Governments around the world have taken control and ownership of most of the world’s forests.

Indigenous peoples comprise approximately 5 percent of the world’s population—about 370 million people. They belong to 5000 different indigenous groups. Some 200 million indigenous people live in or near tropical forests, for which they have been guardians and have managed for generations, protecting 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity.

- How can we as Buddhists learn from, not appropriate, but learn from forest peoples who have developed “right relationships” with the forests?

Conclusion

Note to facilitator: Read aloud or pass out the Ecosattva Vows from One Earth Sangha:

The Ecosattva Vows

Based on my love of the world and understanding of deep interdependence of all things, I vow

- To live on Earth more lightly and less violently in the food, products and energy I consume.
- To commit myself daily to the healing of the world and the welfare of all beings; to discern and replace human systems of oppression and harm.
- To invite personal discomfort as an opportunity to share in the challenge of our collective liberation.
- To draw inspiration, strength and guidance from the living Earth, from our ancestors and the future generations, and from our siblings of all species.
- To help others in their work for the world and to ask for help when I feel the need.
- To pursue a daily spiritual practice that clarifies my mind, strengthens my heart and supports me in observing these vows.

From: <https://oneearthsangha.org/programs/2016-ecosattva-training/vows/>

Small group (15 minutes):

Note to facilitator: Ask the audience to get into small groups (no more than 5 people). Each person speaks for 2 minutes, the other partners simply listens in silence, without making suggestions or saying anything. After 3 minutes, switch roles and the next partner speaks. The questions are:

- What is arising for you after this presentation?
- Do you feel that your Buddhist practice or way of life is in right interrelationship with the tropical forests and the reality of extreme deforestation?
- Do you feel that these Ecosattva Vows are meaningful to you?

Closing Aspirations and Circle (5 minutes or longer)

- Close with an open discussion or questions and responses.
- Try to draw out voices that are often silent.

Offer any resources or connections with local activists or organizations that work to protect the forests. If there is time, you may choose to close with a moment of silence and awareness of breathing and interrelationship with the forests.

Dedication of Merit

from One Earth Sangha

Our prayer that any goodness generated here be extended out into the world:

May all places be held sacred.

May all beings be cherished.

May all injustices of oppression and devaluation be fully righted, remedied and healed.

May all wounds to forests, rivers, deserts, oceans, all wounds to Mother Earth be lovingly restored to bountiful health.

May all beings everywhere delight in whale song, birdsong and blue sky.

May all beings abide in peace and well-being, awaken and be free.



INTERFAITH
RAINFOREST
INITIATIVE

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