

# Green religions?

## Perspectives from religious and non-religious worldviews

Religions and worldviews are rich in exploring the issues around green issues, environmentalism and climate justice, and the relation of humanity to the natural world. Below are eight questions, and on the following pages are responses from eight people from different worldviews.

Start by reading and discussing the questions in a small group. Then look at one article each from the following set of interviews, summarising the main ideas to each other.

Write your own answers to the questions, drawing on your learning about the varied perspectives on offer here.

1 In your own life within your religion/worldview, how do you see the Earth and the world of nature?

5 Current problems facing the Earth may have their roots in a casual or exploitative attitude to the planet. What do you think your religion/worldview can offer to correct this?

2 Some people see the Earth as a spiritual entity of some kind. The idea that we are one with the cosmos is an example. How do you see the Earth?

6 When you consider the current environmental crisis, what gives you hope or courage to take action?

3 Please can you give an example of how your own awareness of 'green issues' was enhanced or challenged?

7 What examples from your religion/worldview do you think can inspire more effective action to save the planet?

4 Scriptures and sources of wisdom have much to say about our relation to the natural world. Can you give an example from your community?

8 Anything else on this theme you would like to add?

## Insider ideas: a Humanist view

### James Dart is a Humanist



As a Humanist, I believe that humans have an enormous responsibility to preserve balance and diversity in nature and work to maintain a sustainable environment so that future generations may enjoy its beauty, as we have done.

Whilst I subscribe to no supernatural reading of our place in the cosmos, it is undeniable that we are linked to it, and to nature, in awe-inspiring ways.

To quote [physicist and cosmologist] Lawrence Krauss: 'Every atom in your body came from a star that exploded. And, the atoms in your left hand probably came from a different star than your right hand. It really is the most poetic thing I know about physics: we are all stardust.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, there is something deep and poetic in the words of Mufasa in Disney's *The Lion King* as he says all life is delicately balanced, and the ruler needs to respect every creature because all, from ants and antelopes, are part of the great circle of life.

Humility, empathy and scientific poeticism ground my relationship to the cosmos/nature.

As a teenager I loved Studio Ghibli films. I remember being overwhelmed by two in particular: *Princess Mononoke* and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.

Both had devastatingly powerful environmental motifs which centred, in large part, around humanity's wanton, almost cavalier destruction of the natural world.

Sadly, these films look to have been more prophetic than fanciful.

Humanists UK have some wonderful science communicators among their patrons. Richard Dawkins's *The Ancestor's Tale* (W&N 2004) and Brian Cox's *Human Universe* (William Collins 2014) are brilliant and accessible reads. However, if I were to pick one single book, it'd have to be Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (John Murray 1859). These books remind us that we are not separate from nature (or above it), but of it.

Beyond print, I'd say David Attenborough's timely exposé of humanity's destruction of the natural world is having a much-needed and positive influence on attitudes.

**Humanism is rooted in compassion and evidence. If we, as a species, are to come through the climate crisis, we will need huge helpings of both.**

Ultimately, this is as much a political question as it is philosophical. We must adopt a new lens through which to see development and be constantly asking the question: can this be justified against the backdrop of climate change and environmental destruction?

Greta Thunberg, David Attenborough and Extinction Rebellion have combined, in different ways, to bring environmental issues into sharp focus; they have been a great source of inspiration (even if a little controversial at times).

Equally, to see young people taking their futures into their own hands and unapologetically demanding change, and demanding justice – this fills me with hope.

With that said, we are against the clock. It is not enough to marvel at these people; we must join them.

Public figures who are able to communicate the awe, wonder and beauty of the cosmos are incredibly valuable.

Scientists such as Carl Sagan, Jane Goodall and Alice Roberts are great examples of public figures who have helped to imbue entire generations with an affinity to the natural world, an emotional bond.

As the world moves to restore the environment, these bonds – between humans and nature – may be the difference between failure and success.

In the age of fake news, it is vitally important that we dress ourselves, as best as we are able, in the most up-to-date and reliable scientific facts.

To that end, the way we use social media – a battleground in fact vs fiction – has come to be of increasing importance.

The most effective way to prevent the proliferation of climate-related fake news is to check the content, outlet, authors, sources and pictures. If you're not sure, don't share. Mainstream outlets are, by and large, a good indicator of reliability.

#### James Dart

##### Note

1. Lawrence Krauss's lecture: 'A Universe From Nothing', AAI (Atheist Alliance International) 2009

## Inside a faith: a Jewish view

### Nina Leigh on green issues and Judaism



My religion celebrates all that is beautiful about the Earth and the world of nature. We are commanded by God to take care of the world in which we live, and there are many festivals that pay tribute to that. I consider myself a Cultural Jew and enjoy spending time with my family and community to appreciate and celebrate the many Jewish festivals which take place over the year that focus on nature, the environment and the world. Tu Bishvat, Pesach and Sukkot are just three of our festivals that are noteworthy in relation to these issues.

On Tu Bishvat, we celebrate the New Year for Trees and plant new trees in areas where they are most needed. At our annual Seder, on Pesach, we remember people less fortunate than ourselves by retelling the story of the Exodus and discuss the relevance of the ten plagues and how they have affected and will affect the environment (this is a topic which has gained greater significance this year with the coronavirus and of course the fight to stop global warming). Lastly there is Sukkot, when we give thanks for the harvest and decorate our Sukkahs with fruit and leaves and sleep and eat in them so that we can revel at the stars and the night sky.

This is no coincidence as we Jews believe that God has given us a special responsibility to take care of the world.

In the Torah, we are commanded to respect it, take care of it, cultivate it and hand it back to God unspoiled. After creating Adam and Eve, God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' (Genesis 1:28)

**In Judaism we often use the phrase 'Tikkun Olam', which means 'repairing the world'. Different Jewish denominations have various explanations for this, such as working towards peace, social justice and helping the poor, but in this century more than ever we use it to literally mean 'repair the world'.**

Although the actual phrase 'Tikkun Olam' is not mentioned in the Torah, it was first used in the Mishnah – a collection of rabbinical writings (c. 200 CE) where the rabbis made some changes in Jewish law and they wrote '*mipnei tikkun ha-olam*' ('for the sake of order in the world'). It is also bound up in one of our oldest prayers – the Aleinu (c. 1300 CE), where we pray for God to fix or repair the brokenness of the world. This is recited near the end of each of the three daily ritual prayers.

As a modern Jew, there is no question for me that we are responsible for the world that God created and we must help preserve it as much as we can before it is too late. I have travelled widely and have seen first-hand how important it is to care for it and respect what have.

There are many examples of how my own community has been involved in green issues and Tikkun Olam. My local synagogue (St Albans Masorti Synagogue) is part of the Eco-Synagogue initiative – a movement, launched in January 2018 by Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg of Masorti UK, that encourages environmental awareness and change in religious organisations within the UK. As part of this organisation, we try to use as little disposable cutlery and crockery as possible; use more recycled or recyclable products; buy local, seasonal food to avoid air miles; and improve energy use within the building.

Jewish communities have also been involved with other national and international initiatives, and on Mitzvah Day I have joined other Jewish people in an annual event where we do good deeds for our local communities. I have helped clear litter from overgrown and polluted walking paths and planted trees in our local forest in St Albans where I live, as well as collecting food and clothing for local food banks.

Finally, as a Jewish educator I feel that it is my duty to include the topic of green issues in my workshops whenever I can, and I emphasise the reasons why some of our festivals and prayers seek to appreciate and respect our world for future generations. I am hopeful that by doing this not only will my students have a greater understanding of the Jewish religion, but I will be able to make them see that we take our responsibility seriously.

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## Inside a faith: a Muslim view

Shazia Gleadall teaches RE in Oxfordshire



The Earth and the world of nature are meant to be appreciated in Islam. They are beautiful and are to be reacted to with awe and wonder (the concept of *taqwa* in Arabic). Nature is a constant reminder of God's power and the fact that we as human beings have been provided with a wonderful planet as our home.

**Islam doesn't teach that we are 'one' with nature, but rather that nature is a sign of God's power. We are supposed to appreciate nature and look after the world because we are lucky to have it. Nature is life-sustaining and we depend on it, so we are supposed to be thankful for what we have been provided with by Allah.**

I think people are waking up more and more to how harmful modern lifestyles are to nature and the environment. I have always been conscious of my impact on the planet, but I have been pleased to see more awareness in a religious context. For example, there are Muslim 'green' farmers who take a holistic approach to rearing animals. Therefore, they don't just focus on halal in terms of the slaughter of an animal but also on how the animal is raised and cared for. This was the whole point of what the concept of halal meat was supposed to be, rather than just focusing on the end point of an animal's life as some Muslims mistakenly do now.

Islam focuses on the idea of humans being given the responsibility to look after the planet (very similar to Christianity). Muslims are 'Khalifah', meaning we are Allah's vice-regents and should be looking after the planet which God has provided for us. Therefore, it is a religious duty for Muslims to care for the world and think about the environmental impact of all that we do.

I feel the teachings of Islam can be useful in correcting this negative and exploitative attitude towards our planet. Firstly, Islam teaches that everything belongs to God; therefore, humans do not have the right to damage the planet for our own benefit. The whole idea is that God has entrusted us to care for the

planet. Secondly, Islam teaches that we are interdependent with nature, so if the Earth thrives then so will we. Therefore, we *must* look after the Earth and nature as we need it for our own survival as human beings.

When I consider the environmental crisis, my children give me the courage to take action, as I want them to be able to grow up in a healthy and safe environment. This cannot happen if we constantly abuse the planet, so I want to be able to do whatever I can to help protect the planet. It also gives me hope when I focus on all the good that humans are doing to try and change things for the better, rather than just focusing on all the negative things.

There are many examples within Islam which can inspire more effective action to the save the planet. There are numerous examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad which are inspiring and uplifting. He taught we should care for animals and show kindness to all living things (there is a story of him telling his followers to be careful to not even step on ants when they were walking outside, as well as him being fond of cats). He also taught of the importance of looking after nature and avoiding harming the trees or plants, even in times of war. This shows that kindness is important in Islam and that we have a duty as human beings to look after the planet and nature.

**Shazia Gleadall**

## Inside a faith: a Pagan view

Belinda Twiggs, RE teacher



I have been a practising pagan with a passion for trees for over 30 years.

My philosophy or worldview sees the Earth as a living mechanism, complex, fascinating and beautiful, worthy of honour and respect. It pervades everything I do. My awareness of the world around me informs my philosophy and beliefs, which in turn inform how I respond to the world around me. It is cyclical in nature, as nature is cyclical.

It seems glaringly obvious to me that we are merely one part of this finely tuned mechanism, and not understanding this has led to the idea that we can dominate and subordinate. Our home environment is hugely unbalanced by our continued maltreatment and misuse. Climate change, exhaustion of finite resources and even Covid-19 are results of this view.

The Earth and the multi-faceted existence of all of nature, of which we are part, is, without doubt, complex. Physics shows that we are formed from matter that has been in the universe for millennia; to put it more poetically, we are 'star dust'. It is mind-boggling to try and comprehend. Humans are capable of great art and endeavour, always wondering and asking questions, and so many interpretations of answers. The problem is when the lens is egocentric rather than ecocentric, all about humans: it should be about the web of life.

**Let's take 'green issues' as meaning the importance of the living, growing matter on Earth. It provides us with oxygen, and the environment. It is a scientific fact that a major cause of climate change is anthropogenic. Addressing this responsibly and sustainably requires engagement and effort from all people and all levels. Working in education, sharing facts and asking questions is a good start. We need to take personal responsibility and not expect someone else to sort it out.**

In the UK, we inhabit the temperate rainforest zone of this planet, and have already done to our land what Brazil is criticised for doing to the Amazon. It does seem to me to be hugely short-sighted and daft to continue to fell trees, clear 'wild' areas for housing and build yet more roads when our government has said it has committed to reduce greenhouse gases to net zero by 2035 and when science tells us that green areas are carbon soaks. I can't see why planting a few saplings to replace massive old trees and meadow land can be justifiable mitigation. Ultimately, I believe that we are all responsible for this planet, and not just for us but for generations to come. Our home is priceless and unique.

I enjoy celebrations like Christmas and Easter, although I am not a Christian; I respect all faiths and none. I have learned more from seeing the passage of time as cyclical not linear, so mark the solar and fire festivals. Each season's new growth builds

upon previous years' experiences. It's really helpful for a summer-loving, winter-loathing person like me to see the winter months as a time of inward reflection and the longer days of warmth as a time to step out and do and live. Always, my thoughts, meditations and reflections are rooted in my personal lens on nature and the world.

In a nature-based philosophy, I share with many the knowledge of the vital importance of trees. George Monbiot recently discussed the idea of them as being the best engineering ever to bring about balance in our climate. Reports of millions being planted all over the world, and primary children telling me they want to plant to save the planet, are encouraging. Legal cases are being brought to give lakes in North America the 'right' to exist, and to make illegal the felling of ancient woodlands. Increasing numbers of people are deciding to turn to a plant-based diet, to reduce their impact on the draining of resources, reducing their consumption and reusing and recycling. This all gives me hope.

Humans should mirror the Earth, complex, fascinating and beautiful, worthy of honour and respect. Develop a 'love of all existences'.

**Belinda Twiggs**

## Inside a faith: a Sikh view

Ishpal Kaur Dhillon, publisher, author and creative designer



Through the grace of God, nature provides for all our needs. Therefore, it is not to be exploited. Mother Earth is the womb in which all things grow. It is the giver of sustenance and we are to respect and value its worth. Everything comes from the All Mighty, who is the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. The fabric of life exists in the creation of the One, omnipresent within all of creation. As Sikhs, we have a moral duty to care and think in ways that help nature as opposed to damaging it. Living within an ethical lifestyle with the basic and fundamental principle of *daya* (compassion) is important in Sikh daily life. As the saying goes, never bite the hand that feeds – Mother Earth.

The fact that the Lord is omnipresent and omnipotent is what makes the Earth and nature a spiritual entity. In the sacred scriptures, Japji Sahib paath, Guru Nanak Dev Ji proclaims that there are countless worlds, and ours is just one of many. We are not the centre of the universe. The Earth and nature is a spiritual entity. Having a human form is the highest form of reincarnation, providing a blessed opportunity to break the cycle of rebirth and death and also one day merge with the True Creator of the entire cosmos. Everything is interconnected and is an extension of the Timeless Creator of all.

In recent years my family has been trying to put more focus on ethics, purchasing more organically produced

foods and growing our own garden vegetables. *Daya* is the first core principle in the Sikh faith, a way of thinking which can be applied in our daily life practice. Being fully conscious of our carbon footprint is not fuelled by public demand, but because this is the humanitarian thing to do as Sikhs.

**Again, in Japji Sahib paath, part of a Sikh's daily morning practice, Guru Nanak Dev Ji states: 'The Air is our Guru, The Water is our Father, and the Earth is our Great Mother.' The Earth is truly considered as the womb, which feeds the world, providing necessities for humanity, sustaining mind and body with its natural riches.**

As mentioned before, *daya* is a true foundation for Sikhi way of life. We can use this concept in daily life to be more consciously aware of the exploitation of child labour, animal welfare and deforestation. Looking upon the treatment of the planet through the lens of *daya*, we can try to nurture it as opposed to destroying it. The Earth does not belong to us, but to the Creator. It comes down to cause and effect, the laws of karma – we reap what we sow, as Guru Nanak Dev Ji states in Japji Sahib paath. So, if you exploit and destroy the planet, then you would have to harvest the consequences of these actions.

Our lives are defined by our actions, but there is never a bad time to make an active change for the better good. Now counts.

If we have the strength to act, then even small actions can be steps to a better change. As Edmund Burke said,

'Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.'

What does this mean practically to me? The world has become very globalised: foods come from all over the world, and this has hugely increased food miles and added to the carbon footprint, which is not environmentally effective. Instead, sourcing seasonal foods that are locally produced is far more cost-effective as well as being more practical. We should not become slaves to the consumerism but focus more on the carbon footprint we leave on the environment. We must nurture animals that roam this planet; they are not to be exploited and treated barbarically for consumers' desires. Living in harmony and respecting the womb of Mother Earth where all sustenance grows should be a way of thinking and living within a Sikh's daily life. Making these changes can improve our climate.

The Sikh faith has many beautiful humanitarian beliefs that can help structure a Sikh's way of life, whilst living in harmony within this world. I have been fortunate enough to write about some of the core principles of what the Sikh faith teaches in a collection of educational, story and information books (see my website [ishpalkaur.com](http://ishpalkaur.com)). There is endless wisdom within the Sikh religion, and through dedication, perseverance and patience we can embody strong foundations which can help us grow into respectful human beings. We have been taught to love, care and respect everything, including ourselves, as we are all part of God's creation. We humbly walk this Earth as mere students of the Divine One, because as Sikhs we are always learning.

**Ishpal Kaur Dhillon**

## Inside a faith: a Christian view

Matthew Neville is a member of Carrs Lane United Reform Church in Birmingham



Most of us live at arm's length from the natural world. I have a shared allotment, and I enjoy the outdoors; that's great. But I know that I can get food in a supermarket, I can stay dry and warm in winter, and I have clean water and waste disposal. So my relationship to the natural world is quite different from that of most of my ancestors, and from the biblical writers. I have to study and think to gain a level of understanding which would have been intuitive in past times. I am aware of this distance and of my need to trust the older and deeper wisdom of past times which were more in tune with the natural world.

The creation narratives of Genesis (1 and 2) are important parables. Creation is presented as being something which exists in harmony with God, but separate from God. Humanity is given an important role, both as part of creation and in caring for the rest of creation. A crucial difference from some forms of modern economic thinking is that the Earth does not belong to humanity – we are asked to look after it, but it is not ours to do with as we please.

There are some other secular ways of thinking which see humanity as a pathogen currently infecting the Earth. There are times when our actions justify this thinking. But for the Christian faith this is not who we are

called to be; we have a positive role to play.

Over the last decade there has been a great awakening to environmental issues among Christians. For me personally it came in 2014 when I read *The No-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change* by Danny Chivers [New Internationalist 2011] and *This Changes Everything* by Naomi Klein [Simon & Schuster 2014]. Both books woke me up to the seriousness of our current situation. Around a similar time I became aware of Christian Climate Action and their call to take more these issues more seriously.

I mentioned Genesis 1 and 2 above – this is the starting point for a Christian understanding of these questions. Throughout the Bible there are examples of the natural world rebelling against humanity's mistreatment: Noah's flood (Genesis 7), the plagues of Exodus (7–11), the drought in the time of Elijah (1 Kings 17–18) or Jonah's storm (Jonah 1) are famous examples. These parables have to be read carefully. I think we are realising in our own time that there is deep wisdom here about the relationship between the natural world and how we as humans behave.

The current crisis has its root in a heresy: that a small section of the world's wealthiest people believe that they own the planet, and can exploit both the Earth and the rest of humanity for their own benefit. The Bible continually speaks out against the exploitative practices of the rich on behalf of the discarded. We need to listen to this challenge.

There is no doubt that the outlook for the climate looks very bleak. Thankfully, it doesn't all depend

on us. The Bible tells many stories in which small acts for goodness somehow become part of a bigger transformation. We have to trust that God's grace is bigger than us.

I note two positive movements of recent times.

**Firstly, in the middle of the last decade Christian leaders from across the world and across the spectrum of denominations started to talk and write about caring for creation. There has been a focusing on the need for action.**

**And secondly, at grass-roots level I have seen many more Christians starting to take action on climate change, be that dis-investment in fossil fuels, the growth in Christian climate activism or the commitment of more and more Christians not to fly.**

There is hope, but we need to stay awake about how much there is still to be done. We all need to stay attentive to the impulses within ourselves to destructively over-consume. We live in a culture of endemic over-consumption; radically changing how we live will not come easily. We need a strong spiritual practice which both forgives when we fail and keeps returning us to a different, more life-giving story.

**Matthew Neville**

## Insider ideas: an ethical vegan's view

Maegan Davies-John is an ethical vegan



The Earth and all life upon it are precious. Human beings, in my philosophy, are no more worthy of life and pleasure than any other animal, and thus no creature should be exploited for our gain. The same goes for the land and resources of the Earth; we should live consciously to reduce damage to our environment and consume within our means. Unless a dramatic change occurs in our behaviour as a human population, and our human-centric attitude becomes more in tune with the needs of the planet, we are headed for an uncertain, bleak future indeed.

I am sceptical of dogmatic religion, but convinced we possess a spiritual energy that manifests in our thoughts and actions. From the moment you enter the planet, your mind is filled with influences and messages; in return, in our actions and words we release energy back to the world. Hence, self-reflection, awareness and understanding are extremely important, for the actions and words you say leave whatever energy they possessed behind and go on to affect others and the world, leaving it a better or worse place than before you came. Living consciously for the sake of all is a huge part of my worldview.

At the vegan restaurant where I work, although I knew we were helping the

environment by avoiding funding the meat industry, which is a top polluter, I approached my manager, concerned when I saw we used regular supermarket loo paper in plastic packaging. I recommended a brand I'd heard of that delivers to your door, no plastic in sight, all trees replanted and then some. He'd considered it already, but a little research showed the suppliers shipped from China, and those air miles weren't 'green' at all. It's quite alarming how few alternatives there are, such that even those being super-cautious make mistakes and end up hurting the Earth ... Imagine those who don't care at all.

**The sources of wisdom of our movement are the modern-day doctors and scientists who have turned against the tide and are producing groundbreaking, myth-busting research which, if the powerful forces of advertising can ever be beaten, will change the world and the way that everyone on it views food.**

Many ancient cultures, including Buddhism and Hinduism, have very relevant teachings, regardless of whether one is religious as such. The Hare Krishna movement disperses literature about the spiritual and health-based importance of a vegetarian diet. Ethical vegans extend the rule so that the same respect, care and consciousness extends to prevent all exploitation of animals.

Certain practices seem normal to us, but on deeper inspection we realise

we don't agree with them at all. Ethical veganism can help realign people's choices with the morals they hold deep down ... The meat industry is already suffering as the shift towards veganism continues to grow by the day. We must as individuals take responsibility not to support companies with practices that exploit the planet, even if that means foregoing some luxuries.

I'm hopeful to hear so many others deciding to cut down their intake of animal products. It gives me hope to see so many varieties of plant milk filling the shelves. I'm inspired to act because I know that saying the right words at the right time to the right person will not only change their mind but the minds of countless others they may come across. We must stand together to make a difference – politicians are doing nothing as the planet burns, so it's heart-warming to see *children* taking initiative and striking, acting on their own terms, trying to make a difference, in a world where the ones in charge seem so complacent.

There are some amazing documentaries – *Game Changers*, *Forks Over Knives* and so on – which are giving factual evidence in an accessible format to so many people. In the process, they are dispelling myths that have enabled the meat industry to thrive for decades, such as needing protein from meat to gain strength. By showing people there is not only an ethical reason to be vegan, but that the health of themselves, their kids and the planet we live on depends upon it, more people will become sympathetic to our cause.

**Maegan Davies-John**

## Inside a faith: a Buddhist view

Gen Kelsang Pagpa, a Buddhist monk and religious educator from Lancashire



Buddha taught that our world is the creation of our karma or actions, and all environmental problems such as hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding and so forth are the ripening of our collective negative actions. He also taught that our world or environment is the creation or projection of our own mind – an impure mind sees an impure world and a pure mind sees a pure world – much like in a dream. That said, we need to take care of the planet and the environment as our actions have the power to temporarily improve our living environment or make it worse. What we're up against are our negative minds or, as we call them in Buddhism, 'delusions' such as greed, attachment and ignorance, because these powerfully influence our actions.

**In Buddhism, we don't see the Earth as a spiritual entity, but we do need to respect it as it's our life-support system, and as is commonly said 'there's no Planet B'.**

This planet is our home and we need to stop polluting it. Buddhist scriptures teach that we need to practise respect for the environment and consideration for others. For example, the eighth-

century Indian Buddhist Master Shantideva says in his poem 'Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life':

**I should keep places clean and not throw litter  
But dispose of it correctly.  
Moreover, I should not defile  
Water or land used by others.**

(English translation, Tharpa 2002)

I think the biggest problems are greed and ignorance. We're using the planet's resources up at an incredible rate due to our strong craving or attachment because we think that material things are the source of our happiness and so we crave more and more, and also we are ignorant of the effect of our desires on the sustainability of the planet and the stability of the environment.

Production is spiralling out of control to meet unsustainable demand and we are polluting our air, water and land to such an extent that our planet may soon be unfit for human habitation. We are also torturing animals in factory farms to satisfy an insatiable desire for meat, one of the consequences of which we are currently experiencing: the proliferation of flu viruses and other diseases which are highly communicable and dangerous. We are likely to face many worse pandemics in the future unless we change our values and practices.

The root of all these problems lies in our mind – it is self-centredness, where we consider our own needs and

wishes to be of primary importance and we neglect the happiness and needs of others. My teacher, a great Buddhist meditation master called Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, offers a solution to this problem in his book *How to Transform Your Life* [Tharpa 2017]:

*All the problems of human society, such as war, crime, pollution, drug addiction, poverty, injustice, and disharmony within families, are the result of self-cherishing. Thinking that human beings alone matter, and that the natural world exists to serve human desires, we have wiped out thousands of animal species and polluted the planet to such an extent that there is great danger it could soon be unfit even for human habitation. If everyone were to practise cherishing others, many of the major problems of the world would be solved in a few years.*

We cannot change the world, we can only change ourselves. I do believe that, in order to save our ailing planet, we need to individually curb our own uncontrolled desires, which can be achieved only through the internal changes brought about by meditation. I do believe that if meditation was promoted and practised, we could see a shift in attitudes and beliefs that would bring about action and real change. We need to promote a more simple and peaceful lifestyle where we have fewer desires and can find more contentment from within. If this can be done, I think we have real hope for the future, and this inspires me to try to improve myself and lead by example, although it's not easy.

**Gen Kelsang Pagpa**