

# GREEN RULE

## ~study guide~

A handbook to discover the sacredness of creation  
within the world's faith traditions.

**Islam**  
Have you not considered how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word being like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven?  
Qur'an 16:24

**Christianity**  
What is the Kingdom of God like?... It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.  
Jesus, Luke 13:18

**Confucianism**  
Does Heaven say anything? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced. Does Heaven say anything?  
Confucius, Analects 17:19

**Buddhism**  
Cut down the forest of desire, not the forest of trees.  
The Buddha, Dhammapadam 283

**Bahá'í Faith**  
Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God.  
Bahá'í Báb, Gleanings 177

**Shintoism**  
Return the thing given to the human as a gift of nature to its original place.  
Ancient Japanese Saying

**Jainism**  
Nonviolence is the supreme religion. One who looks on the creatures of the Earth, big and small, as one's own self, comprehends this immense world.  
Lord Mahavira

**Hinduism**  
I am the fragrance of the Earth, the heat in fire. I am the life of all that lives.  
Lord Krishna, Bhagavad Gita 7:9

**Native Spirituality**  
Great Spirit, help us learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.  
Native American Prayer

**Zoroastrianism**  
Who created the waters and the plants? Who yoked the swiftness of the winds and the motion to the clouds? For I beheld Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord) as the primeval source of creation.  
Gatha Ushavarti 44:4

**Judaism**  
When God created the first human beings, God led them around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said: "See my works how beautiful and how plentiful they are! Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy My world".  
Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7

**Sikhism**  
Air is the Guru, Water is the Father and Earth is the Great Mother of All.  
Guru Granth Sahib, p. 8

**Taoism**  
In harmony with the Tao, the sky is clear and spacious, The Earth is solid and full. All creatures flourish together...  
Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching 39

**Unitarianism**  
We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.  
Seventh Unitarian Principle

**THE GREEN RULE**

Do unto the Earth as you would have it do unto you

Published by Faith & the Common Good  
To order poster contact:  
greenrule@faith-commongood.net  
www.fair-commongood.net

“Every leaf of the tree becomes a page of the sacred  
scripture once the soul has learned to read.”

Sa'dí Shirazí Sufi master (1213-93)



Faith & the  
Common  
Good

# Introduction

Thank you for choosing the Green Rule poster and for using it to create awareness about the sacredness of creation. We at Faith & the Common Good (FCG) believe that the environmental crisis is, at its root, not merely a crisis of pollution and extinction, but a crisis of alienation and fragmentation, a crisis of the spirit. Only when we can work together and communicate meaningfully with one another at the heart and soul level can we hope to bring about the necessary changes required to live in peace, harmony and health. The Green Rule poster is one small contribution to that intention and vision.

This study guide offers some background comments on the poster and makes suggestions about how it might be used in a religious, spiritual and/or educational setting:

Commentary on the poster . . . . .	pages 3 and 4
Green Rules and trees w/interpretation. . . . .	pages 5 through 12
Educational workshops. . . . .	pages 13 through 16
Additional workshop ideas for youth, yoga etc. . . . .	pages 17 and 18
Green Rules only (for contemplation) . . . . .	page 19 and 20

The sacred quotes, prayers, and story excerpts on the poster and in this guide are selected from a variety of the world’s great spiritual teachings. Although just a tiny sampling of the written and oral riches exclaiming the beauty and holiness of the natural world, they were chosen to demonstrate that each religious philosophy has a long-standing tradition of ecological stewardship. As well, they acknowledge the natural world as an essential phenomenon through which we may better come to know the divine and our oneness with it.

## Who is Faith & the Common Good?

Faith & the Common Good is a national interfaith network dedicated to bringing different faith communities together to seek common ground for the common good. Since 2000, FCG has brought people of faith into dialogue and public engagement on economic justice, health, and ecology issues. Currently, through our Renewing the Sacred Balance (RSB) theme and Greening Sacred Spaces (GSS) program, we are focusing on issues of faith, health and eco-sustainability. In the face of climate change and loss of biodiversity, there is a pressing need for energy conservation, alternatives to fossil fuels, and more careful use of resources. FCG helps people of faith forge creative spiritual and action-oriented responses.

We see ourselves as part of a growing interfaith/intercultural movement that connects people’s spiritual and ethical practices with how we live in relationship with each other and the planet.

For more information about Faith & the Common Good go to:  
[www.faith-commongood.net](http://www.faith-commongood.net)

To order a Green Rule poster or more guides, email:  
[greenrule@faith-commongood.com](mailto:greenrule@faith-commongood.com)

# Commentary on the Poster

## What is the Green Rule?

The Green Rule is not technically a set of “rules” but rather a collection of sayings, some didactic, others more metaphoric, drawn from the great sacred teachings of the world’s religions and spiritual traditions that express the sacredness of creation and humanity’s interconnectedness with it. Faith & the Common Good derived the Green Rule concept from the classic Golden Rule that is found in the major faith traditions. In Christianity, for example, the Golden Rule is “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” In Hinduism; “Do not do to others what would cause pain to you.” In Islam, “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” And so it goes in many faiths.

For the Green Rule we are paraphrasing the Golden Rule by saying: “Do unto the Earth as you would have it do unto you.” We have looked to the same sacred teachings of many of the world’s spiritual traditions to reveal similar expressions of concern, only in choosing our quotes we have extended the plea for compassion to include all of our neighbours: human beings, animals, birds, trees... We are not promoting nature worship rather we are advocating nature nurture, a respect for nature in recognition that nature has given us sustenance, beauty and life itself since time immemorial.

## How the Poster and Handbook Came Together

The poster grew out of an expressed need by faith leaders and educators for a visual tool to show how major faith traditions support a ‘green’ or ecological perspective. We came up with the idea at our annual FCG brainstorming retreat, in the summer of 2004. A FCG staff member developed the background image and collected a number of quotes pertaining to creation-care from the key sacred texts of each faith tradition represented on the poster. The texts were then analyzed by religious leaders and laypeople within each faith community for accuracy and suitability. Each faith leader offered helpful insights that contributed to the end result. We realize, however, that it is just one sentence from each tradition and therefore can in no way sum up the faith’s entire perspective on religion and ecology. The Green Rule poster is a simple but hopefully not simplistic symbolic tool to help people make connections between ancient, time-honoured spiritual beliefs and the pressing planetary issues we face today. Our FCG website offers an opportunity for you to send us your ideas about the Green

Rule and your faith tradition. Go to [www.faith-common-good.net/rule/index.asp](http://www.faith-common-good.net/rule/index.asp)

Many thanks to all who were part of this process! In particular, thank you to Paul McKenna and the interfaith team at Scarboro Missions who launched their own Golden Rule poster in 2000 (see [www.scarboromissions.ca](http://www.scarboromissions.ca)), and who have guided FCG in our process.

## Why a Tree?

On close inspection of the poster you will notice that there is one tree but many different species of leaves. Each leaf is symbolically significant to the faith it represents (see below for more explanation) and many have some relevant healing quality. The variety of leaves on one tree is intended to express the old adage ‘unity in diversity.’ As a metaphor, the Green Rule tree proposes that the human and natural world is an interconnected web of distinct yet interdependent living species and elements. Together they form our common home and, guided by the love of God/Creator/Mother Earth/ Divine Spirit/Holy One/Allah /Ahura Mazda/ Brahman/ Buddha/ Tao/Vishnu/Yahweh ... they sustain us.

The tree, in one form or another, has been sacred to humans throughout the ages. Forest groves served as our first temples and inspired our first churches. Many traditional cultures still believe gods and spirits (dryads) dwell in trees. Thousands of forests exist today because they were preserved for spiritual and religious purposes, providing invaluable information about biology and biodiversity. The Green Rule poster represents a microcosm of creation, suggesting that to maintain life as we know it humanity needs biodiversity, cultural diversity and spiritual diversity. This study guide suggests ways we can consider trees, and nature in general, as a teacher and look to them and to our faith traditions for inspiration and guidance in healing our mutual home, planet Earth.

*“Trees impart wisdom to those willing to receive it and assist humans in transformation of consciousness bringing us closer to living in harmony with Earth Mother and the rest of the world community”*

Sacred Trees, Nathaniel Altman 1994

In addition to their powerful symbolism, trees play an essential role in supporting life and restoring the health of people and the planet. Tree roots, bark, wood, leaves, fruits and nuts have always provided humans, and all creatures with food, shelter and medicines. As they breathe in carbon dioxide (a key greenhouse gas and pollutant) and breathe out oxygen, trees maintain the delicate atmospheric balance that allows life as we know it on Earth. By acting as great 'carbon sinks' they effectively mitigate the effects of global warming caused by the greenhouse effect. LEAF ([www.leaftoronto.org](http://www.leaftoronto.org)) recommends planting evergreens on the north side of your home for winter shelter and to reduce your home's heating bills. In the summer, a few well-placed shade trees on the south side will lower your energy consumption by reducing or eliminating the need for air conditioning ([www.treecanada.ca](http://www.treecanada.ca)). Green Roofs for Healthy Cities ([www.greenroofs.org](http://www.greenroofs.org)) helps people plant trees and gardens on the last, yet vast, urban frontier, the roof!

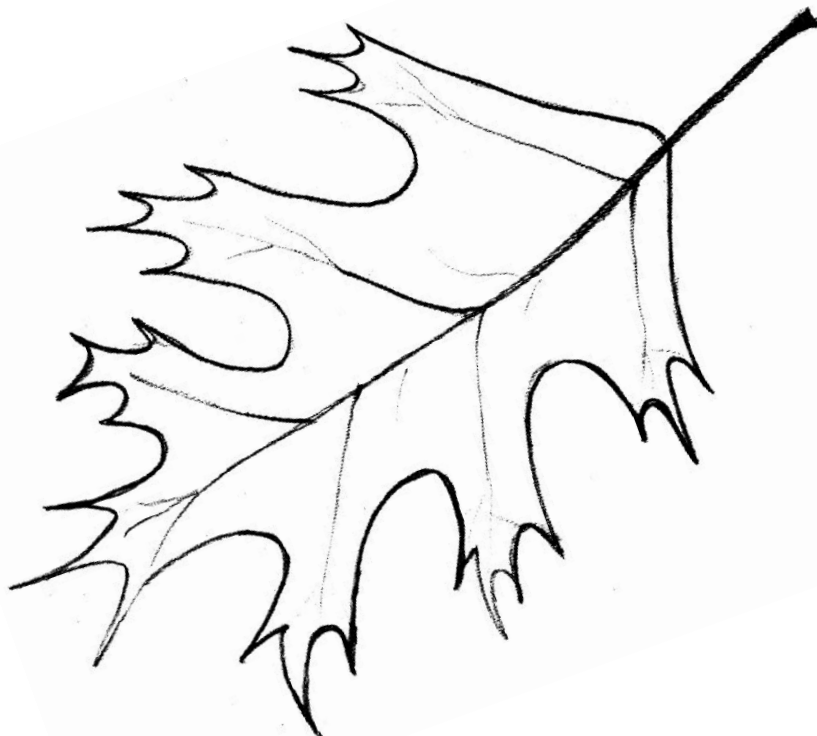
Through the miraculous process of photosynthesis trees 'eat' sunlight, turning it into usable energy that makes the abundance and diversity of life on Earth possible. And, we all learned the hydrological cycle in grade school and know that trees play an invaluable role in moving water around the globe through transpiration. They also absorb excess water to prevent flooding and their roots reduce topsoil erosion.

*“A tree growing out of the ground is as wonderful today as it ever was. It does not need to adopt new and startling methods.”*

Robert Henri

Trees are also engaged citizens of their own communities. Their roots can mingle and sometimes fuse, thereby allowing the trees to communicate, exchange nutrients, and help each other out, writes David Suzuki in his book *Tree, A Life Story*. Like people, trees like to grow together in large groups, as though for comfort or protection. They have relationships, within their own kind as well as with other species and, as indicated above, they function for the benefit of the whole in some amazing ways, offering homes to birds, amphibians, mammals, and living things of all kinds. “Without forests,” writes Suzuki, “animal life on earth would almost certainly still be primarily marine.”

Faith & the Common Good hopes the Green Rule will contribute to deeper thinking about how the wisdom of our faith traditions and of creation can heal our overstressed world. We at FCG think in terms of interfaith and intercultural, rather than multifaith and multicultural, as interfaith suggests that we are doing more than simply existing side by side. Rather, like trees, we are interrelating in sustainable ways.



# The Green Rules

Following, you will find the Green Rule sayings for each faith tradition represented on the poster, with a commentary on them and on the leaves behind the text. As with all sacred teachings the interpretations vary. To provide some context, we offer one interpretation based on

our research and discussions with many scholars and faith leaders. However, we encourage you to find your own meaning in these texts. On the last two pages of this study guide are the Green Rules on their own, for you and your study group to contemplate and discuss.

## Bahá'í Faith

### Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God.

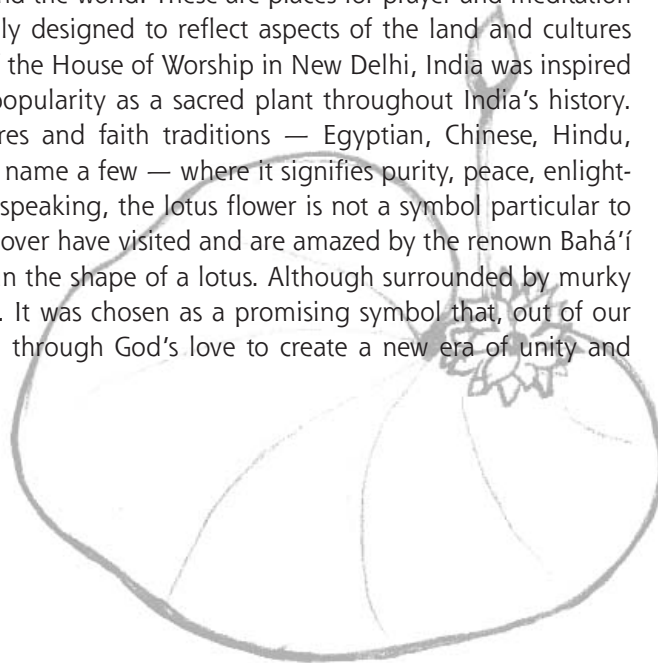
Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 177

#### ONE INTERPRETATION:

A fundamental teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í faith, is the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing mankind Bahá'u'lláh says, "Ye are all leaves of one tree and the fruits of one branch." By this it is meant that the world of humanity is like a tree, the nations or peoples are the different limbs or branches of that tree and the individual human creatures are as the fruits and blossoms thereof. Bahá'u'lláh enjoins His followers to develop a sense of world citizenship and a commitment to stewardship of the Earth. Baha'i writings are imbued with a deep respect for the natural world and for the interconnectedness of all things.

#### LOTUS LEAVES:

One of the ways the Bahá'í community honours the diversity of the human family is in the design chosen for the Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world. These are places for prayer and meditation for people of all backgrounds and are usually designed to reflect aspects of the land and cultures where it is built. For example, the architect of the House of Worship in New Delhi, India was inspired by the lotus flower due to its unparalleled popularity as a sacred plant throughout India's history. Indeed, the lotus is revered in many cultures and faith traditions — Egyptian, Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Biblical and Islamic to name a few — where it signifies purity, peace, enlightenment and a manifestation of God. Strictly speaking, the lotus flower is not a symbol particular to the Bahá'í Faith. Yet, many people the world over have visited and are amazed by the renown Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi that is built in the shape of a lotus. Although surrounded by murky waters, the lotus rises and remains unsullied. It was chosen as a promising symbol that, out of our ignorance, humanity will grow and blossom through God's love to create a new era of unity and peace.



# Buddhism

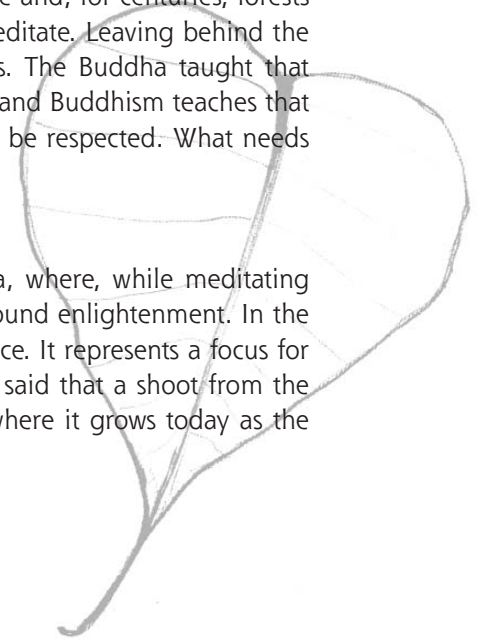
**Cut down the forest of desire, not the forest of trees.** *The Buddha, Dhammapada 283*

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

The Buddha achieved enlightenment while meditating under a bodhi tree and, for centuries, forests have been the chosen locale where Buddhist monks and nuns go to meditate. Leaving behind the desires of the world they seek solitude and simplicity among the trees. The Buddha taught that nature's balance is only possible thanks to the various functions of trees, and Buddhism teaches that everything is interconnected and all life, animate and inanimate, should be respected. What needs to be 'managed' is not forests but human nature.

## THE BODHI TREE:

The bodhi tree is named after the place, Bodh Gaya in Northern India, where, while meditating under the branches a great bodhi, some 2500 years ago, The Buddha found enlightenment. In the centuries following, the bodhi became a symbol of The Buddha's presence. It represents a focus for worship and is found alongside Buddhist temples throughout Asia. It is said that a shoot from the original "Buddha" bodhi tree was carried to a monastery in Sri Lanka where it grows today as the oldest continually documented tree in the world.



# Christianity

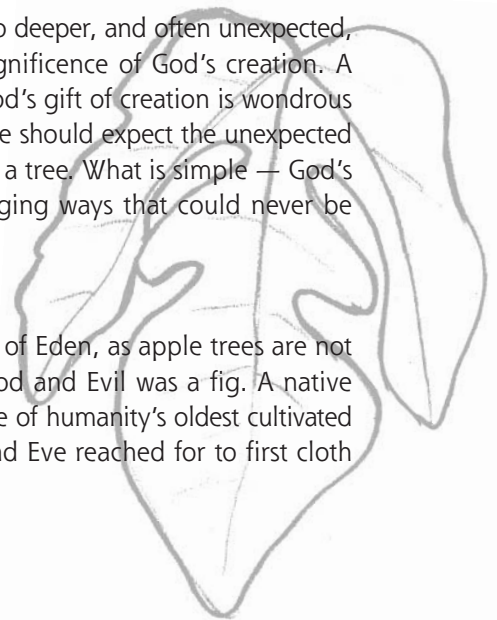
**What is the kingdom of God like?... It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed it in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.** *Jesus, The Bible, Luke 13:18*

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

Jesus uses parables to teach his followers simple lessons that also point to deeper, and often unexpected, meanings. The simple lesson of the mustard seed points to the magnificence of God's creation. A tiny seed produces a large tree that in turn feeds and houses many. God's gift of creation is wondrous and generous. At another level, Jesus may have been suggesting that we should expect the unexpected with God. In fact, a mustard seed grows only into a mustard bush, not a tree. What is simple — God's love and justice — comes to us in different, surprising, and challenging ways that could never be imagined from a simple seed.

## THE FIG TREE:

It is unlikely that Adam and Eve ate from an apple tree in the Garden of Eden, as apple trees are not native to the Middle East. More likely, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a fig. A native of southwest Asia, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the fig is one of humanity's oldest cultivated foods and healing medicines, as it was also the fig leaf that Adam and Eve reached for to first cloth themselves.



# Confucianism

**Does Heaven say anything? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced. Does Heaven say anything?**

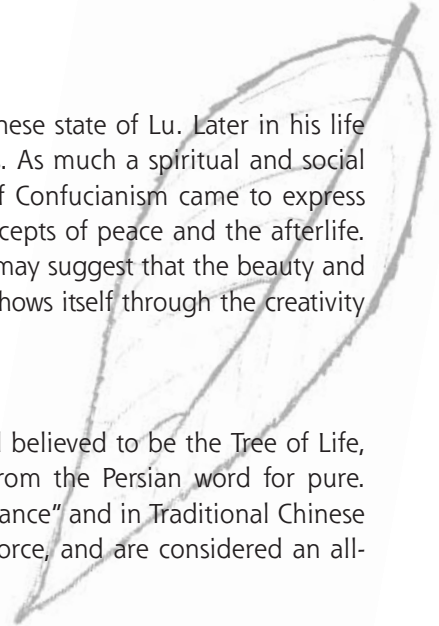
Confucius, Analects 17.19

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

Confucius was born in the Chou Dynasty, circa 551 BCE, in the Chinese state of Lu. Later in his life he traveled through China offering wisdom to the country's leaders. As much a spiritual and social philosophy as a formal religion, the moral and ethical teachings of Confucianism came to express aspects of Taoist harmony with nature combined with Buddhist concepts of peace and the afterlife. This quote from the main writings of Confucius, called the Analects, may suggest that the beauty and mystery of nature is unfathomable even to Heaven and yet Heaven shows itself through the creativity and regularity of Nature.

## THE PEACH TREE

The peach tree is native to China, where it is considered sacred and believed to be the Tree of Life, symbolic for longevity and immortality. The word peach comes from the Persian word for pure. Taoism holds that peaches contain a spiritual force or the "soul substance" and in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) peaches are used to activate qi /chi, the vital life force, and are considered an all-round health tonic.



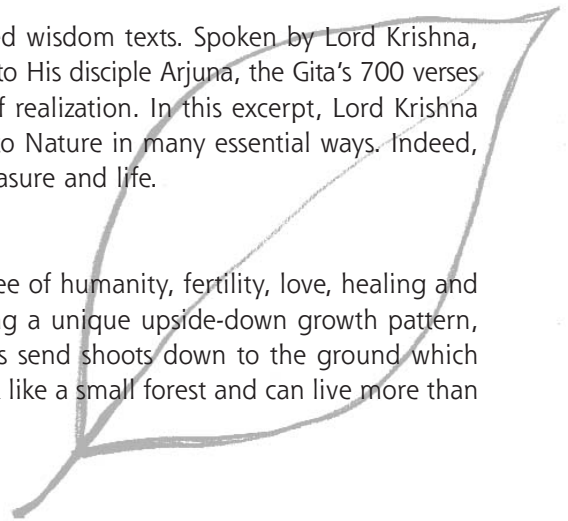
# Hinduism

**I am the fragrance of the Earth, the heat in fire. I am the life of all that lives.** Lord Krishna, Bhagavad Gita 7.9

The Bhagavad Gita is the best-known of India's vast sacred wisdom texts. Spoken by Lord Krishna, one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu or the Supreme God, to His disciple Arjuna, the Gita's 700 verses provide a spiritual and ethical guide to the science of self realization. In this excerpt, Lord Krishna expresses the idea that He and we, humanity, are linked to Nature in many essential ways. Indeed, the various elements of Nature give us food, warmth, pleasure and life.

## THE BANYAN TREE:

On the Indian subcontinent, the banyan symbolizes the tree of humanity, fertility, love, healing and life. In some regions the banyan is held sacred. Displaying a unique upside-down growth pattern, banyan seeds dropped in another trees branches by birds send shoots down to the ground which become many new banyan trees. A single banyan can look like a small forest and can live more than 1000 years.



*Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come.* Chinese proverb

# Islam

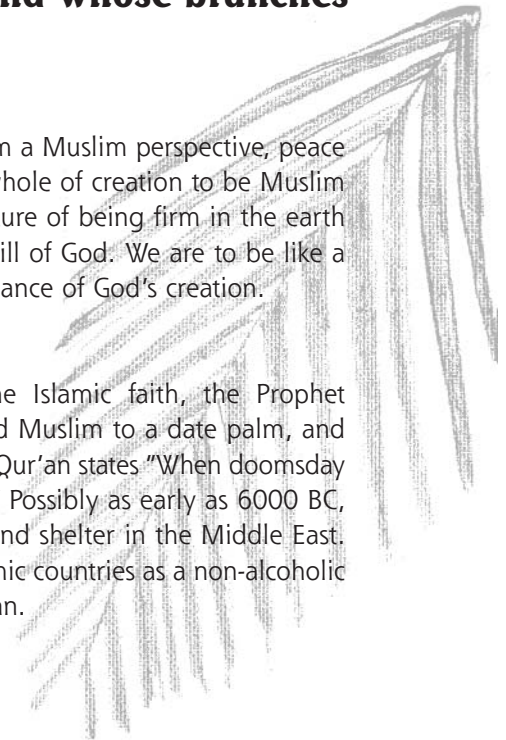
**Have you not considered how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word being like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven.** *The Qur'an 14:24*

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

'Islam' means 'peace,' and 'Muslim' means 'one who submits,' so from a Muslim perspective, peace comes from submission to the will of God. Muslims understand the whole of creation to be Muslim in that all of nature submits to the will of God. A tree, by its very nature of being firm in the earth while reaching for heaven, is a model Muslim for it submits to the will of God. We are to be like a tree by reaching for the light while not changing the essence and balance of God's creation.

## DATE PALM:

The date palm has been sacred to many ancient cultures. In the Islamic faith, the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, was said to have compared a good Muslim to a date palm, and said that planting such a tree was a satisfactory substitute for alms. The Qur'an states "When doomsday comes, if someone has a palm shoot in his hand, he should plant it." Possibly as early as 6000 BC, date palms have provided a main source of nourishment, medicine and shelter in the Middle East. More recent products include a sparkling date juice, used in some Islamic countries as a non-alcoholic champagne, for special occasions and religious times such as Ramadan.



# Jainism

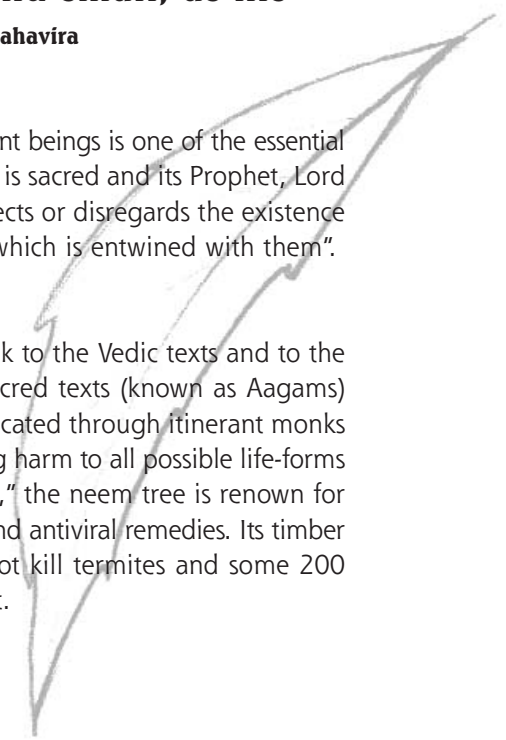
**He who looks on the creatures of the Earth, big and small, as his own self, comprehends this immense world.** *Lord Mahavira*

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

Nonviolence, Ahimsa in Sanskrit, to human beings as well as to all sentient beings is one of the essential contributions of Jainism to world philosophy. Jainism holds that all life is sacred and its Prophet, Lord Mahavira, proclaimed a profound truth when he said: "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them".

## NEEM TREE:

Jainism has existed since time immemorial in India. While Hindus look to the Vedic texts and to the Brahman caste for religious leadership, Jains developed their own sacred texts (known as Aagams) and seek spiritual guidance from Lord Mahavira's teachings, communicated through itinerant monks and nuns. At the core of the Jain faith are five vows, of which minimizing harm to all possible life-forms is supreme. A native of India, where it is called 'the village pharmacy,' the neem tree is renowned for its healing capabilities, from purifying the blood to offering antiseptic and antiviral remedies. Its timber has been revealed to have a natural pesticide that repels but does not kill termites and some 200 other insects, thus neem oil is being used as a natural insect repellent.





# Judaism

**When God created the first human beings, God led them around all the trees of the garden of Eden and said: “See my works how lovely they are how fine they are... Take care not to corrupt and destroy My world.”**

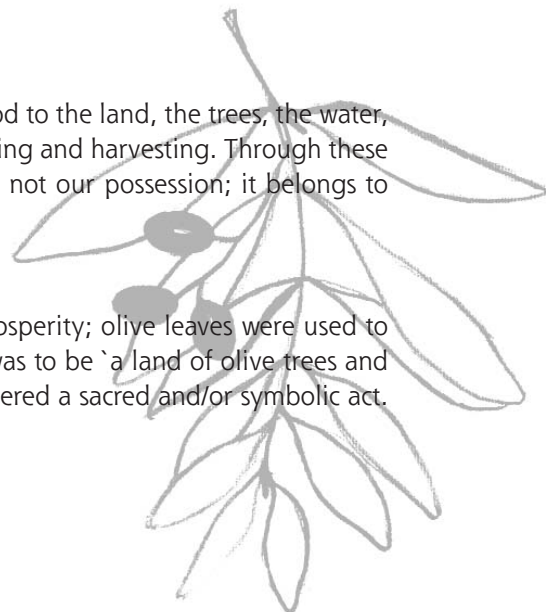
**Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7**

## **ONE INTERPRETATION:**

Hebrew Scripture abounds with images and stories that connect God to the land, the trees, the water, wind and soil, with vivid metaphors about planting, tending, pruning and harvesting. Through these stories we learn about God and the divine guidance. The Earth is not our possession; it belongs to God. We are not meant to dominate the Earth, but to care for it.

## **OLIVE TREE:**

In the ancient world, the olive tree was symbolic of peace and prosperity; olive leaves were used to crown Olympic champions. For the Israelites, the Promised Land was to be ‘a land of olive trees and honey’, and anointing people and objects with olive oil was considered a sacred and/or symbolic act.



# Native Spirituality

**O Great Spirit... help us learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.** *Native American Prayer*

## **ONE INTERPRETATION:**

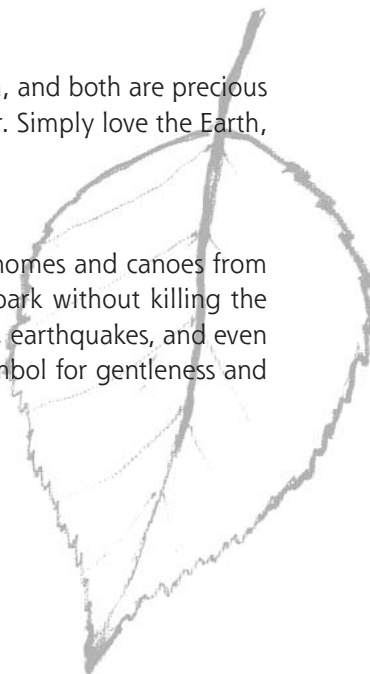
As Chief Seattle said, the Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth, and both are precious to God. Therefore, do not harm the Earth or you heap contempt on its creator. Simply love the Earth, care for it, and learn from it.

## **BIRCH TREE:**

Indigenous People of North America have a long tradition of making their homes and canoes from birch bark. They devised a sustainable system that allowed harvesting the bark without killing the tree. Birches are the first trees to grow back after natural disasters such as fire, earthquakes, and even nuclear contamination. Though its wood is hard, the tree is considered a symbol for gentleness and peace, and a grove of birches is an ideal place to meditate.

## **Chinook Psalter**

May all i say and all i think  
Be in harmony with thee,  
God within me, God beyond me,  
Maker of the trees.



# Shintoism

## Return the thing given to the human as a gift of nature to the original place.

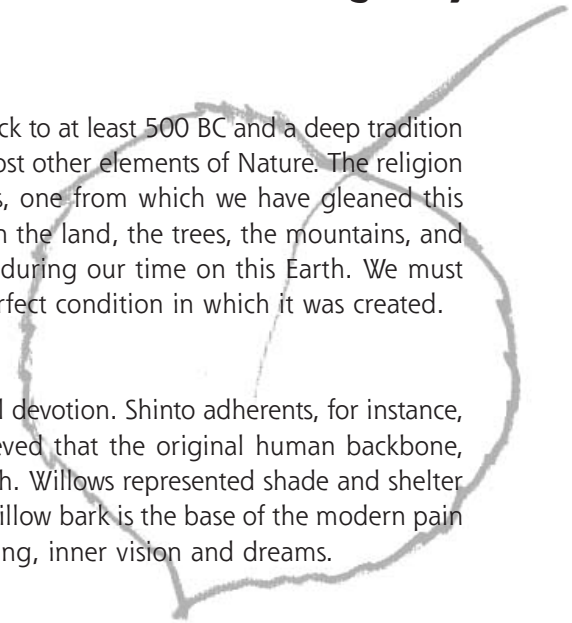
Ancient Japanese saying

### ONE INTERPRETATION:

Shintoism, the native religion of Japan, has roots reaching back to at least 500 BC and a deep tradition of veneration for the land, its mountains, rivers, trees and most other elements of Nature. The religion does not have set sacred texts but rather many oral stories, one from which we have gleaned this Green Rule. One of its messages may be that we do not own the land, the trees, the mountains, and the rivers. They are but a gift for us to enjoy and care for during our time on this Earth. We must repay this generous offering by leaving the Earth in the perfect condition in which it was created.

### WILLOW TREE:

In Japan, trees and stones have long been objects of spiritual devotion. Shinto adherents, for instance, considered the willow a sacred and healing tree and believed that the original human backbone, supple in youth, growing rigid with age, was a willow branch. Willows represented shade and shelter from storms, and were often used for medicinal purposes (willow bark is the base of the modern pain reliever, Aspirin). Generally, willows are associated with spring, inner vision and dreams.



# Sikhism

## Air is the Guru, Water is the Father and Earth is the Great Mother of All.

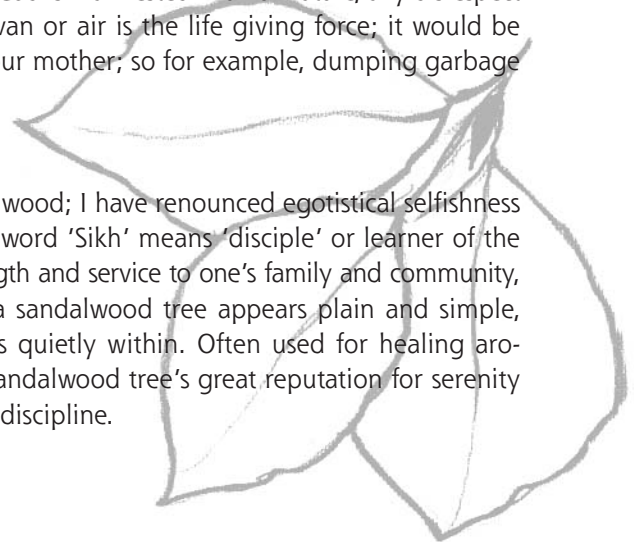
Guru Granth Sahib, p. 8

### ONE INTERPRETATION:

The central Sikh scripture, called Sri Guru Granth Sahib, has a very large number of writings that describe the integral relationship between the One Creator and creation, indeed the sacred text describes often how the Creator resides in creation. Since God is manifested in all of nature, any disrespect for the environment represents disrespect for God. Pavan or air is the life giving force; it would be sinful to pollute it. Pani or water sires us, and earth is our mother; so for example, dumping garbage into rivers would be unforgivable behaviour.

### SANDALWOOD TREE:

"My mind has become fragrant with the scent of sandalwood; I have renounced egotistical selfishness and conceit" said Saint Kabir, in the Guru Granth. The word 'Sikh' means 'disciple' or learner of the Truth, and Sikhism places much emphasis on inner strength and service to one's family and community, which includes the natural world. From the outside, a sandalwood tree appears plain and simple, however, its sacred essence and renown fragrance lies quietly within. Often used for healing aromatherapy and incense for religious ceremonies, the sandalwood tree's great reputation for serenity and simplicity stands for beauty combined with inner discipline.



# Taoism

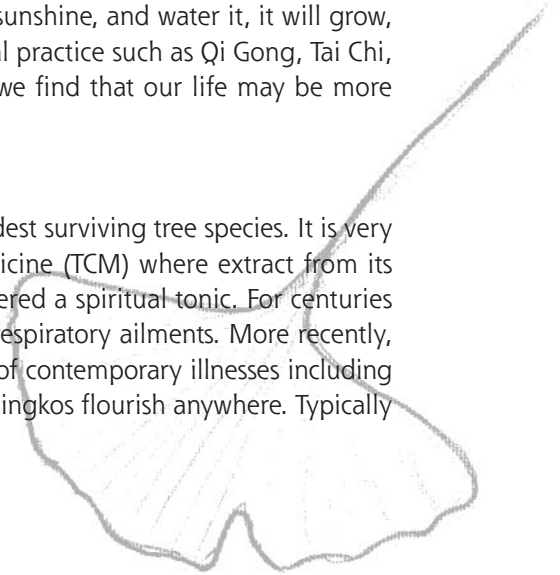
**In Harmony with the Tao, The sky is clear and spacious,  
The Earth is solid and full, All creatures flourish together...** Lao Tzu, Tao te Ching 39

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

In Taoism, Harmony is the overriding principle in nature. Flow and vitality are the natural states of life. For instance, if you plant a seed in good earth with plenty of sunshine, and water it, it will grow, without you having to force anything. When we engage in spiritual practice such as Qi Gong, Tai Chi, Yoga, Prayer, Meditation, and/or belong to spiritual community we find that our life may be more harmonious and our body may have more vitality.

## GINGKO LEAF:

Dating back more than 300 million years, the ginkgo tree is the oldest surviving tree species. It is very sacred in China and Japan, especially in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) where extract from its leaves is used to improve blood flow, brain function and is considered a spiritual tonic. For centuries the Chinese have used tea made from ginkgo seeds as a cure for respiratory ailments. More recently, ginkgo leaf extract has been used as a treatment for a wide range of contemporary illnesses including Alzheimer's and depression. Highly pollution and stress-resistant, ginkgos flourish anywhere. Typically found at shrines and temples, they also thrive in cities.



# Unitarianism

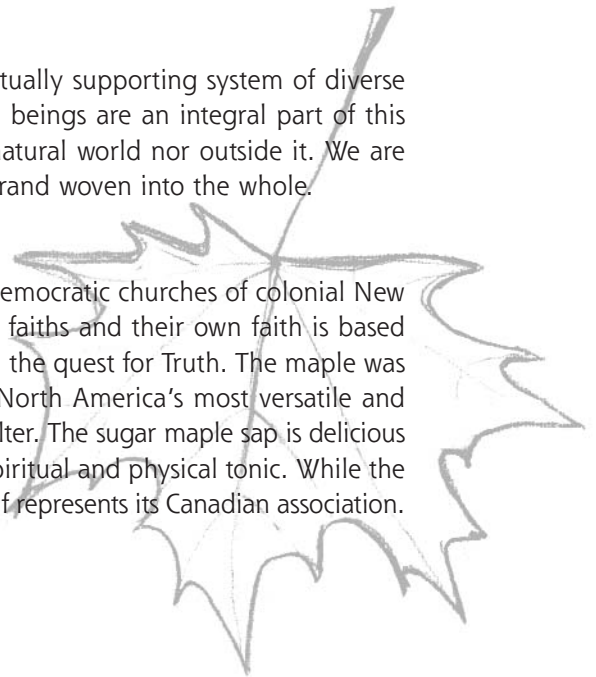
**We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all  
existence of which we are a part.** Seventh Unitarian Principle

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

It is not enough to say that the natural world functions as a mutually supporting system of diverse organisms that we observe from the outside. Rather, we human beings are an integral part of this larger network of organisms. Humankind is neither above the natural world nor outside it. We are embedded within this delicate, interrelated web of creation, a strand woven into the whole.

## MAPLE TREE:

Unitarian roots in North America began with the independent, democratic churches of colonial New England. Adherents are known for their open-mindedness to all faiths and their own faith is based on principles of individual conscience and personal experience in the quest for Truth. The maple was chosen as the symbolic leaf for Unitarians because it is one of North America's most versatile and known trees. Its wood is used for fine furnishings or lumber for shelter. The sugar maple sap is delicious and nutritious. First Nations people drink the sap in spring as a spiritual and physical tonic. While the flaming chalice is the universal symbol of Unitarians, the maple leaf represents its Canadian association.



# Zoroastrianism

**Who created the water and the plants? Who yoked the swiftness of the wind and the motion to the cloud? For I beheld Ahura Mazda as the primeval source of creation.** Zarathustra, Gatha Ushtavaiti 44.4

## ONE INTERPRETATION:

All creation by Zarathushtrian faith is sacred and it is the responsibility of humanity to safeguard, sustain and ensure its survival. Zarathushtis believe, 'we have not inherited this earth from our ancestors, but have borrowed it from our children' and therefore humanity has an obligation to use with utmost care what does not belong to us. The Zoroastrian religion demands that we venerate the elements of nature, use them with moderation, never to abuse them with excess, defile them with pollution, or diminish them with greed. We owe it to the Creator to bring this consciousness to all people.

## OAK TREE:

Known as the 'king of trees' and the Tree of Wisdom, the oak was chosen to represent Zoroastrianism because Zarathustra, the Persian prophet who founded the faith some 3500 years ago, based Zoroastrianism, the world's first monotheistic religion, on the premise of wisdom. Trees were paid homage to and used to invoke Ahura Mazda, God of Wisdom and all Creation ('Ahura' meaning 'Lord', 'Mazda' meaning 'wisdom'). Zarathushtrians believe that all creation is sacred and it is responsibility of the humanity to safeguard, and sustain its survival.

# African, Aboriginal and World Other Faiths

The Green Rule poster does not represent all the world's faith traditions. That would be impossible given the innumerable forms of spiritual expressions. The evergreen branch without a text, at the centre of the tree, represents African, Australian Aboriginal and all the other faith traditions and indigenous people that we could not fit on a single poster but whom are seminal to and have inspired the creation-care concept. The yew, pine, eucalyptus and cedar trees, among other evergreens, have had sacred significance to the first peoples around the world since time immemorial. In general, evergreens represent renewal and the eternal.

We invite you to submit a Green Rule (and a representative tree if you feel inspired) from your own spiritual tradition, especially if your tradition is not represented here, so that we can continue to update our texts and grow our Green Rule 'tree' into a truly universal Tree of Life.

## African Canticle

All you big things, bless the Lord  
Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria,  
The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain,  
Fat baobabs and shady mango trees,  
All Eucalyptus and tamarind trees  
Bless the Lord, praise and extol Him for ever and ever.

All tiny things bless the Lord  
Busy black ants and hopping fleas  
Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae  
Flying locust and water drops  
Pollen dust and tsetse flies  
Millet seeds and dried dagaa  
Bless the Lord, praise and extol Him for ever and ever.

# Green Rule Workshop

In essence, the flow of a workshop is:

1. Welcome, introductions, and initial comments
2. Learning about the texts: allow people some time to read the texts quietly to themselves and meditate on what the texts say to them.
3. Ask them to choose one Green Rule each to meditate/reflect on more deeply.
4. Small group discussion — in groups of three or so, have individuals comment on the text(s) they chose to meditate on).

Optional: Health Break/Refreshments: Yoga “Tree” posture (see page 18)

5. Larger group discussion — choose a couple of questions (see below) to discuss. The goal is to reflect on how these texts call us to action in today’s world.
6. Fruit meditation (see below)
7. What can be done? Plans for action in your sacred spaces, homes and broader community
8. Closing

## Introduction

The Green Rule workshop invites participants to reflect on the sacredness of the Earth from the perspective of the world’s many religions. Faith & the Common Good hopes that these texts will spark deep ethical conversations as well as playful, joyful projects that inspire many people of all ages and walks of life to be better stewards in relationship to creation. (Note: This workshop is open to creative interpretations and refinement. Feel free to experiment with the suggested ideas below.)

## Preparations

- Gather in a circle enough chairs or cushions for the anticipated number of participants.
- Supply recycled/reused backsides of paper and pens for participants who may forget to bring their own.
- A flip chart or blackboard is useful
- A Green Rule poster on the wall and copies of the Green Rules (see above) printed out for each participant
- One piece of fruit for each participant i.e.: dates, figs, grapes, slices of peach, apple
- Yoga Tree posture instructions posted for all to see (below)
- Review questions — A list of questions regarding the Green Rule appropriate to the audience size and interests. If the constituency is a specialized group e.g. all ministers, or teachers, or youth, or environmental activists etc... questions can be selected accordingly. (Below, 10 suggested questions for general group discussion)

## 1. Welcome & Introduction

The GSS Green Facilitator or faith leader welcomes the participants, points out the Green Rule poster on the wall, and outlines the intention of the workshop: to gain a deeper appreciation of how world religions call us to a deeper, inter-dependent relationship with the Earth.

Participants are invited to introduce themselves, not in any particular order and only as they feel moved to. They can give their names and offer an initial impression about what the poster says to them or why they are at the workshop.

## 2. Learning about the Sacred Texts

Distribute the Green Rule sayings with OR without the Interpretations (see pages 19 and 20 for Green Rules on their own), depending on how you would like to conduct your workshop. Ask individuals first to read the Green Rules to themselves, then go around the circle allowing participants to read one each aloud.

## 3. Silent Meditation

### READ QUOTE

"He who sits alone, rests alone, walks alone unindolent, who in solitude controls himself, will find delight in the forest."  
The Buddha

Participants are invited to spend a few minutes in silent meditation. The facilitator explains that the first step in the process of healing the planet is healing one's self. Meditation is a process of self-discovery, of 'rooting' ourselves, and thereby helping us become less self-interested, more open to others and to creation.

### LEANING AGAINST A TREE

Buddha obtained enlightenment meditating under a tree. Ask participants to imagine they are leaning against the solid trunk of a tree. Invite participants to connect with the tree's strength, its groundedness, its calm. Asking participants to take long, slow, deep breaths, breathing in right down into the belly and coming fully in the present moment, breathing out, invite participants to drop their shoulders away from the ears let go of all thoughts of the past, concerns for the future... Suggested time of mediation-two to five minutes, for a two-hour workshop, longer if time allows.

### INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

The facilitator then invites participants to choose one of the Green Rules, either from their own faith tradition, or another, that particularly resonates with them. Ask them to write a few reflections on it so they can share them with others in a small group.

## 4. Small Group Discussion

The facilitator asks the group to break into smaller groups of about three to discuss the texts and what they mean to them.

### HEALTH/REFRESHMENT BREAK (if time/inclination allows, see sheet below, Yoga, Tree posture)

One of the basic balancing postures in yoga is called in Sanskrit "Vrksasana", the Tree posture. The facilitator demonstrates the Tree posture and invites participants to stand and begin 'renewing their sacred balance' by assuming the Tree pose.

Afterwards, invite discussion about the connection between a healthy body and balanced mind and a balanced global ecology.

## 5. General Group Discussion

The facilitator asks all participants to form one circle again and to address a few of these larger questions. You may want to record some of the answers on a flip chart for the closing segment. The objective in this larger discussion is to move from conceptual understanding to individual and communal action.

### **Possible Questions About the Green Rules**

- What is the overarching message of The Green Rule?
- If a similar ethical principle is expressed in each of the sacred writings, what is it?
- Can you see differences and similarities among the 14 quotes? What are they?
- Virtually all religions and spiritual traditions emphasize love and compassion for one's neighbour. Consider, who is your neighbour? Is a tree your neighbour? A bird? A river? Discuss.
- Discuss, is there a difference between worshipping nature and caring for creation?
- In your opinion, are there any flaws in your religious/spiritual worldview that may be part of the environmental crisis?
- Which expression of The Green Rule do you like the best? Why?
- How might you engage your Green Rule at home, at school, in your workplace etc...?
- Write your own Green Rule. Do you think that these sacred teachings could be helpful in promoting communication and harmony among people of different faiths? Why? Why not?
- What do the Green Rules call us to do?

or write your own questions appropriate for your group.

## **6. Food Meditation**

Invite the group to take a piece of fruit from the plate you have prepared and instruct them to examine it for a moment. Then invite them to eat the piece of fruit VERY slowly, savouring each sensation: taste, scent, texture. Ask participants to imagine the land where this fruit tree may have grown, the people who planted the tree and picked the fruit, how it may have traveled to the store where we bought it, and so on.

Follow with a discussion about how the simple savouring of this food is a way to connect us with the goodness of creation and consider what grows where. Are we buying foods that are local or are they traveling from far away? Are we buying and eating foods that are grown organically? By practicing more mindful eating, appreciating the food in its natural form and giving thanks for the many hands involved in bringing it to us, we begin to reconnect with the natural world. It enables us to see our interdependence with creation and allows us to live in more healthy, and wealthy (meaning well-being) ways. (See Slow Food Movement [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com))

## **7. What can be done?**

In drawing the group session to a close, summarize what you have learned together about the different texts, how they point us to a renewed sense of connection with Creation, each other, and the way we live in relation to the natural world. Ask about next steps for each other and/or for the group.

NOTE: Faith & the Common Good has a program called Greening Sacred Spaces that continues this discussion about how we can green both our worship spaces and our homes and community. See [www.faith-commongood.net](http://www.faith-commongood.net)

## **8. Closing**

Thank everyone for taking the time to participate.

You might invite people to join hands in a circle and offer a brief thought, or prayer, about this time together. Or answer one of these questions:

- What have I learned during this program?
- How do I feel?
- As a result of this workshop, I feel moved to...

You might read one of the following prayers/poems, or one of your choice:

### **Jain prayer of forgiveness**

I grant forgiveness to all living beings  
 And all living beings grant forgiveness to me  
 My friendship is with all living things  
 My enmity is non-existent

### **Hindu scripture from the Arthava Veda**

We are birds of the same nest,  
 We may wear different skins,  
 We may speak different languages,  
 We may believe in different religions,  
 We may belong to different cultures,  
 Yet we share the same home, our Earth.

### **Sikh Meditation**

In the garden of the soul,  
 Plant the seed of the word.  
 Water the soil with love and humility  
 And reap the fruits of divinity.

### **Hawaiian Prayer**

May the earth continue to live  
 May the above heavens continue to live  
 May the rains continue to dampen the land  
 May the wet forests continue to grow  
 Then the flowers shall bloom  
 And we people shall live again

Even if I knew the world would come to an end tomorrow,  
 I would go into the garden and plant an olive tree.  
 Unless we plant now, there will be no shade for our children,  
 No oil to heal the wounds, no olive branch to wave for peace when it comes.

**Father Mitri Raheb, Lutheran pastor to Kairos delegation, Bethlehem, 2004**

The real miracle is not walking on water or flying through the air, it is walking on this Earth.

**11th century Confucian philosopher**



# Additional Ideas

Here are a few other suggestions that might be added to the above workshop, especially if you are working with youth:

## Designing your own tree of life:

The facilitator invites participants to design their own tree. Ask them to name it, describe its leaves, fruits, seeds, needs... Provide paper, drawing utensils, etc.

Ask people to describe what it feels like to create a tree of life? Discuss how complex and wonderful it is.

## Health Break ~ Yoga ~ The Tree Posture

The Tree asana is a calming balancing posture to help us be more fully present in the moment. It helps us develop stability, strength, concentration and poise so that we are more at peace in our bodies and on the Earth.

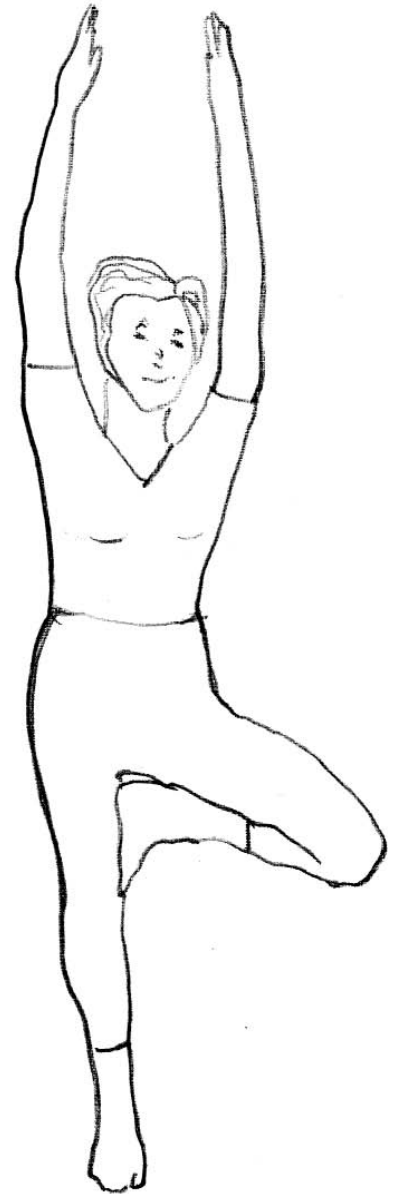
To begin: stand with your feet hip-width apart. Be aware of the weight of your body flowing into your legs and feet, and feel your feet grounded on the earth. Arms are relaxed at your sides, shoulders lowered from ears.

Focus on your breath. Inhale deeply into your belly, followed by a long slow exhale (try 'resting' for a moment after the exhale before inhaling again). To help you balance, place your eyes on a point about five feet in front of you and hold a steady, soft gaze.

Lean into your left leg and, as you exhale, slide your right leg up the inner left calf. Either rest it here, toes pointing down, or (using your hand if it helps), slide/lift your right leg above the left knee and let it rest on the inner left thigh. Do not rest your foot ON the knee joint. To lengthen your 'trunk' (waist and spine), drop your right knee down and back so that it extends out to the side. Tuck the tailbone/sacrum under slightly, bringing your pelvis into a 'neutral' position.

Focus on your breath. Inhale deeply into your belly, followed by a long slow exhale, 'resting' for a moment after the exhale. Maintain your soft steady gaze.

Steady your balance. Feel your feet 'rooted' in the earth. When you feel balanced, bring your hands into prayer position at the heart, then, if you feel steady, slowly raise your arms over your head as shown in the diagram (otherwise, simply remain standing on the one leg with palms in prayer position at your heart), palms facing one another, and gently reach for the sky. Breathe. When you are ready, slide your right leg down the left to the floor. Breathe, and repeat on the other side.



## Tree Planting

The Facilitator introduces the idea of tree-planting programs and other eco-sustainable faith-in-action programs — see [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org) article on the Redwood Rabbis and [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org) and read the Tu B'Shevat poem by Israeli poet Shin Shalom. The festival of Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish New Year of the Trees, is celebrated on different days each year but usually sometime in January or February with a Seder meal that reconnects us with the fruits of the Earth. Celebrants often engage in active reforestation and tree-planting programs at this time.

On Tu B'Shevat  
when spring comes  
An angel descends  
ledger in hand  
and enters each bud, each twig  
each tree and all our garden flowers.  
From town to town  
from village to village  
the angel makes a winged way  
searching the valleys  
inspecting the hills  
flying over the desert  
and returns to heaven.  
And when the ledger will be full  
of trees and blossoms and shrubs  
when the desert is turned into  
a meadow  
and all our land a watered garden  
the Messiah will appear.

If you would like to contact the designers of the Green Rule poster and study guide with suggestions or for any other purpose, or to order Green Rule posters and study guides, see [www.faitth-commongood.net](http://www.faitth-commongood.net) or email [greenrule@faitth-commongood.net](mailto:greenrule@faitth-commongood.net)

# The Green Rules

## Bahá'í Faith

**Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God.**

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings 177

## Buddhism

**Cut down the forest of desire, not the forest of trees.**

The Buddha, Dhammapada 283

## Christianity

**What is the kingdom of God like?...It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed it in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.**

Jesus, The Bible, Luke 13:18

## Confucianism

**Does Heaven say anything? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced. Does Heaven say anything?**

Confucius, Analects 17.19

## Hinduism

**I am the fragrance of the Earth, the heat in fire. I am the life of all that lives.**

Lord Krishna, Bhagavad Gita 7.9

## Islam

**Have you not considered how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word being like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven.**

The Qur'an 14:24

## Jainism

**He who looks on the creatures of the Earth, big and small, as his own self, comprehends this immense world**

Lord Mahavira

## **Judaism**

**When God created the first human beings, God led them around all the trees of the garden of Eden and said: "See my works how lovely they are how fine they are...Take care not to corrupt and destroy My world."**

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7

## **Native Spirituality**

**O Great Spirit...help us learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.**

Native American Prayer

## **Shintoism**

**Return the thing given to the human as a gift of nature to the original place.**

Ancient Japanese saying

## **Sikhism**

**Air is the Guru, Water is the Father and Earth is the Great Mother of All.**

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 8

## **Taoism**

**In Harmony with the Tao, The sky is clear and spacious,  
The Earth is solid and full, All creatures flourish together...**

Lao Tzu, Tao te Ching 39

## **Unitarianism**

**We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

Seventh Unitarian Principle

## **Zoroastrianism**

**Who created the water and the plants? Who yoked the swiftness of the wind and the motion to the cloud? For I beheld Ahura Mazda as the primeval source of creation.**

Zarathustra, Gatha Ushtavaiti 44.4

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