



INTERFAITH
RAINFOREST
INITIATIVE

A BAHA'I 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 Baha'i Toolkit presents a series of reflections, meditations, prayers, talking points, and lesson plans aimed at Baha'i practitioners, and assembled with the help of Theresa Henkle Langness, David Langness, and Christine Muller. 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

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF ST. BARBE BAKER, THE “MAN OF THE TREES”

By David Langness

Today I want to tell you an inspiring story about a Baha'i who dedicated his entire life to saving the world's forests—and in the process, explain why Baha'is view nature as a beautiful expression of the will of God.

Richard St. Barbe Baker, known as “the Man of the Trees,” was one of the first global conservationists. He spent his entire life working with indigenous people on all six continents to help save their forests. Describing him, Jane Goodall said, “He was, without a doubt, one of the greatest advocates for the protection and restoration of forests, ever. I am amazed by his life and accomplishments. He is one of my heroes.”

A recent St. Barbe Baker biography summarized his remarkable life as a global environmental leader this way:

In his twenties and thirties, he pioneered now familiar development concepts such as social forestry, permaculture, agroecology, fair trade, and tourism. In his forties, he succeeded in maneuvering the warring factions in Palestine into a collaborative reforestation scheme. In his fifties, he campaigned to save California's redwoods. In his sixties, he crossed the Sahara on a ground-breaking ecological survey. In his seventies, he traveled the length of New Zealand—more than 1500 kilometers—on horseback. In his eighties, he took up the study of Chinese, intending to cross the Gobi Desert on a Mongolian Pony. In his nineties, he finally made it to China. – Paul Hanley, *The Man of the Trees*, p. xvi.

Like all Baha'is, St. Barbe Baker was a world citizen and an advocate of racial equality. St. Barbe Baker co-founded his first environmental organization—Watu wa Miti, which means “people of the trees”—in 1922 with Kikuyu chieftain Josiah Njonjo in the highlands of Kenya. Together, the two men inspired and joined with literally thousands of indigenous Africans to protect rainforests and plant trees. Today, St. Barbe's original organization has now become the International Tree Foundation, which fosters these basic beliefs:

We believe in the development of a fuller understanding of the true relationship between all forms of life in order to maintain a natural balance between minerals, vegetation, animals and man. We believe that forests and woodlands are intimately linked with biological, social and spiritual well-being. – International Tree Foundation mission statement, www.internationaltreefoundation.org

That mission of maintaining the balance of nature and our spiritual well-being echoes the Baha'i teachings, which liken the unity of the human body to the ecological balance and interdependence of the natural world:

... even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together. – Abdu'l-Baha, quoted by The Universal House of Justice in *The Gaia Concept*, 8 June 1992.

In the same way, the Baha'i teachings proclaim that every human being takes part in the integrated unity of the natural world, as an integral part of the human family:

... in reality all mankind represents one family. God has not created any difference. He has created all as one that thus this family might live in perfect happiness and well-being. – Abdu'l-Baha. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 312.

Because of this essential Baha'i principle of the oneness of humanity, the Baha'i teachings also ask everyone to "Attach great importance to the indigenous population," who can "enlighten the whole world." – Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 32.

For millennia, the world's indigenous peoples have lived in harmony with their forested natural environments. Rainforest peoples, though, now face the grave dangers of deforestation, not only to their way of life but to the great peril of all people. What can we each do about that danger? For starters, we can learn from the example of Baha'is like Richard St. Barbe Baker.

St. Barbe, as he was known, travelled around the world for seven decades, engaging, inspiring and working with indigenous people to plant trees and help save their forests. In 1943 he said:

The tremendous material strides that have been made by our modern civilization have eaten into the natural resources of our earth. The impact of modern industrialism, with its insatiable appetite for raw materials, has caught the forests of the world before man has become aware of his eternal dependence on them. To the trees he owes the stored-up wealth of the coal beds, the fertile earth for the production of food, water for irrigation, and the purity of the very air he breathes. The rise and fall of civilizations waxed and waned as man exploited and devastated the forests. A demon of destruction is at large in the world today, and deserts are on the increase.

The tasks confronting us are gigantic and the time at our disposal limited. There is no need to wait, indeed it would be disastrous to do so. Let us begin today, realizing the vital importance of trees and forests throughout the world.

– Richard St. Barbe Baker, from his address to the initial World Forestry Charter Gathering in London, 1943, cited in Paul Hanley's *Man of the Trees*, pp. 153-154.

He recognized, probably sooner and more globally than many, that the planet's future depends on its trees, especially in the tropical rainforests, the "lungs of Mother Earth."

Up until now, his tireless efforts, the organizations he started, and the work he initiated has resulted in the planting of 26 billion trees! No wonder Charles the Prince of Wales recently wrote:

Behind St. Barbe Baker's prescience was his deep spiritual conviction about the unity of life. He had listened intently to the Indigenous people with whom he worked and seen a similar sensibility in the then new sciences of ecology and silviculture.

It is now clear that had we heeded the warnings of St. Barbe Baker and other visionaries, we might have avoided a good deal of the environmental crises we face today. It is not too late. We can save our forests and reclaim the deserts if, as the motto of the *Man of the Trees*—Twahamwe—puts it, we "pull together as one."

– Charles, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, in his introduction to Paul Hanley's *Man of the Trees*, p. viii.

St. Barbe was convinced that bringing about that oneness in our efforts to save the world's forests, and to save the very oxygen we breathe, would require a global movement of the human spirit. St. Barbe wrote this about Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith:

He was a planter of trees and loved all growing things. When his devotees tried to bring him presents ... the only tokens of their esteem that he would accept were seeds or plants for his gardens. - Ibid., p. 95.

Baha'u'llah's teachings ask us all to regard nature as God's holy creation—to cherish it, to protect it, to ensure that we all regard it as the embodiment of God's role as Creator:

Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. – Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 141.

St. Barbe Baker's pioneering work continues today in many places around the world. In just two of the most notable examples, he inspired Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, to found the pan-African Green Belt Movement, now responsible for planting more than a billion trees on that continent. He also inspired Canadian Baha'i Hugh Locke to co-found the Smallholder Farmers Alliance (SFA) in Haiti, which helps feed and reforest a renewed Haiti. The SFA works by establishing market-based farmer cooperatives that support women farmers, promoting organic agriculture and making trees more valuable in the ground than cut for charcoal—all by having farmer-members of the SFA cooperatives plant trees in order to earn the seed, tools and training required for higher crop quality and yields.

Finally, the Baha'i Faith calls on every human being to come together as one to build a new spiritual reality—a planetary system of governance that recognizes the connection and interdependence of all humankind. When we recognize our close connection to all other people, we will also recognize our close connection to the Earth itself, and our great debt to the natural world. We will accept our collective mission of stewardship, and, as the Baha'i teachings promise:

Erelong shall ye see that even the darkest lands are bright, and the continents of Europe and Africa have turned into gardens of flowers, and forests of blossoming trees. - Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 255-256.

For more about Richard St. Barbe Baker, his commitment to the Baha'i Faith and his life planting trees among indigenous peoples around the world, read the recent biography of St. Barbe by Canadian journalist and author Paul Hanley: Man of the Trees, Richard St. Barbe Baker—the First Global Conservationist, published in 2018 by the University of Regina Press.

TALKING POINTS

THE BAHA'I FAITH, NATURE, AND RESPECT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Baha'i Faith and Baha'u'llah

- The Baha'i Faith, a global religion that began in 1844, teaches the oneness of God, the essential unity of all religions and the oneness of humanity.
- The prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, was tortured, exiled and imprisoned for forty years as a result of his teachings, all intended to unify the world in peaceful and sustainable global solidarity.
- Baha'is around the world follow Baha'u'llah's teachings, which regard nature as God's holy creation—and ask us all to cherish it, to protect it, to ensure that it flourishes.

Baha'i diversity

- Baha'is come from all nations, all racial, ethnic and tribal groups, and all religious backgrounds. The Baha'i Faith is the world's second-most widespread religion after Christianity. The global Baha'i community includes peoples from more than 800 distinct indigenous cultures, whose spiritual beliefs, traditions and wisdom Baha'is respect and uphold.

Progressive revelation

- Baha'is believe in progressive revelation—that each of the founders of the world's major faiths, including Krishna, Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, the sacred messengers of the world's indigenous peoples, and most recently Baha'u'llah—comprise a sequential series of divine educators who all brought the same essential message of love, kindness and unity. Therefore, Baha'is recognize, respect and revere indigenous people's wisdom and stewardship of the Earth.

Unity, harmony and peace

- The worldwide Baha'i community actively works for unity, harmony and peace between all peoples and cultures. The Rainforest Initiative provides an opportunity for Baha'is and people of all Faiths to bring justice and seek harmony for indigenous peoples and the rainforests that sustain them.

Baha'i beliefs

- Baha'is believe in the agreement of science and religion; the eradication of all racial, religious and class prejudice; the equality of women and men; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; implementing spiritual solutions to the world's economic problems; careful, consultative stewardship of the Earth; and the establishment of a system of global governance designed to bring about a planet free of war, exploitation and human suffering.

Support for indigenous rights

- Baha'is support the rights of indigenous peoples to chart their own destinies.

Preserving biodiversity and natural order

- The Baha'i International Community, in a statement to the United Nations, wrote:
... in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity "to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole," every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order. – The Baha'i International Community, "Valuing Spirituality in Development, 18 February 1998, <https://www.bic.org/statements/valuing-spirituality-development>

St. Barbe Baker's example

- The Baha'i teachings urge everyone to evince spiritual principles with deeds, not just words—as did Richard St. Barbe Baker, a Baha'i known as "the Man of the Trees," the first global conservationist.
- St. Barbe Baker started his Men of the Trees organization in 1922, in partnership with the indigenous Kikuyu tribe in Kenya. (In Swahili, "Watu wa Miti") Their goal? To reforest Africa.
- He pioneered now familiar development concepts such as social forestry, permaculture, agroecology, fair trade, and ecotourism.
- St. Barbe Baker led the first successful campaign to save California's redwoods.
- Like all Baha'is, St. Barbe Baker was a world citizen and an advocate of racial equality.
- St. Barbe Baker's *Men of the Trees* environmental organization is now known as the *International Tree Foundation*, and is active in more than 30 countries and among many indigenous peoples to save forests.
- St. Barbe Baker, inspired by the Baha'i teachings about the interdependence of all living things, believed that the wisdom of the indigenous peoples could "enlighten the whole world."

PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

PRAYERS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH AND OTHER TRADITIONS TO HEAL AND HELP THE TROPICAL FORESTS

1. I am well aware, O my Lord, that I have been so carried away by the clear tokens of Thy loving-kindness, and so completely inebriated with the wine of Thine utterance, that whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.

I swear by Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm.

Glorified art Thou, O God of all names and Creator of the heavens! I render Thee thanks that Thou hast made known unto Thy servants this Day whereon the river that is life indeed hath flowed forth from the fingers of Thy bounty, and the springtime of Thy revelation and Thy presence hath appeared through Thy manifestation unto all who are in Thy heaven and all who are on Thy earth. This is the Day, O my Lord, whose brightness Thou hast exalted above the brightness of the sun and the splendors thereof. I testify that the light it sheddeth proceedeth out of the glory of the light of Thy countenance, and is begotten by the radiance of the morn of Thy Revelation. This is the Day whereon the hopeless have been clothed with the raiment of confidence, and the sick attired with the robe of healing, and the poor drawn nigh unto the ocean of Thy riches.

Bahá'u'lláh — (Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2013, p. 271)

2. I swear by Thy might, O Thou Who art the King of names and the Maker of the heavens! Whatsoever hath been adorned with the robe of words is but Thy creation which hath been generated in Thy realm and begotten through the operation of Thy will, and is wholly unworthy of Thy highness and falleth short of Thine excellence.
And since it hath been demonstrated that Thy most august Self is immeasurably exalted above all that hath been created in the world of being, and is far above the reach and ken of the apprehension of Thy chosen Ones and Thy loved Ones, the splendors of the light of Thy unity are therefore manifested, and it becometh evident unto every one, whether free or bond, that Thou art One in Thine own Self, one in Thy Cause, and one in Thy Revelation. Great is the blessedness of

the man who, in his love towards Thee, hath rid himself of all attachment from every one except Thyself, and hastened unto the horizon of Thy Revelation, and attained unto this Cup which Thou hast caused to excel all the seas of the earth.

Bahá'u'lláh — (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2013, p. 274)

3. O my God! O my God! Verily, I invoke Thee and supplicate before Thy threshold, asking Thee that all Thy mercies may descend upon these souls. Specialize them for Thy favor and Thy truth. O Lord! Unite and bind together the hearts, join in accord all the souls, and exhilarate the spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O Lord! Make these faces radiant through the light of Thy oneness. Strengthen the loins of Thy servants in the service of Thy kingdom. O Lord, Thou possessor of infinite mercy! O Lord of forgiveness and pardon! Forgive our sins, pardon our shortcomings, and cause us to turn to the kingdom of Thy clemency, invoking the kingdom of might and power, humble at Thy shrine and submissive before the glory of Thine evidences.

O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord! Dilate the breasts through the signs of Thy oneness and make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life.

Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver, the Forgiving, the Pardoner, the Omniscient, the One Creator

'Abdu'l-Baha — (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, p. 235)

4. Bahá'ís believe that the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the nature and purpose of human life. An understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural environment is an integral part of this vision.

Arthur Dahl — (Dialogues between Faith Values and ESD Values - The Bahá'í Faith, Earth Charter.org, Feb 2, 2012, P. 44)

5. The Earth Charter calls all of us at this critical moment of Earth history to come to our senses and recognize that “in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.”

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, (Netherlands) — (“We Are One Human Body” – Global Empathy as A Central Value for Education for Sustainable Development, Exploring Synergies between Faith Values and Education for Sustainable Development, Earth Charter.org, Feb 2, 2012, p. 14.)

6. Through greed, we have established an economy that destroys the web of life. We have changed our climate and drown in despair. Let oceans of justice flow. May we learn to sustain and renew the life of our Mother Earth.

Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu — (Desmond Tutu's Prayer for the Climate, Anglican Alliance, 2018. www.ccow.org.uk/resources/archbishop-tutus-prayer)

7. On his deathbed, the Buddha's final words of advice to his disciples exhorted them to go forth and seek “salvation” with diligence. In the contemporary context, as the ecological crisis deepens, threatening the very survival of humanity and planet Earth, this advice surely includes a profound appeal to diligently educate for and build a sustainable, compassionate and loving world.

Toh Swee-Hin — (Engaged Buddhism & its Contributions to Sustainable Development and ESD, Earth Charter.org, Feb 2, 2012, P. 65)

8. To us, the earth is the basis of our existence, and we need to retain her whole with all the variety of nature and we cannot negotiate her price or forget about her.
Evaristo Nugkuag Ikanan, Peru, 1986 Right Livelihood Award Winner —
(www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/laureates/evaristo-nugkuag-ikananz, accessed April 16, 2019)
9. What will future generations say of us, who leave them a degraded planet as our legacy? How will we face our Lord and Creator?
From The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change —
(https://unfccc.int/documentshttp://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Islamic_Declaration_V4.pdf, 2015)
10. What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another.
Mahatma Gandhi — (https://www.azquotes.com/author/5308-Mahatma_Gandhi. Retrieved April 16, 2019)
11. Now, in the face of increasing disasters caused by climate change, we must act to prevent further global warming, help communities prepare for environmental disasters, and provide relief to those affected.
2009 Resolution of the Commission on Social Action to the Union for Reform Judaism —
(<https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/resolution-addressing-impacts-climate-change>, accessed April 16, 2019.)
12. We the indigenous people are still listening and singing with new generations, because we believe that someday, that will certainly come, we will share with black, white and yellow children. We trust that the voice of the future is the voice of the children that cry and sing. A childhood that is not poor or rich and has no color, because it is the spirit of nature that wants to live for the well-being of all of us.
Marcos Terena (Brazil) — (Memory and Science and Indigenous Knowledge, Kari-Oca Declaration, Rio 92-Summit, Article 13, Earth Charter, pg. 12.)
13. The time will soon be here when my grandchild will long for the cry of a loon, the flash of a salmon, the whisper of spruce needles, or the screech of an eagle. But he will not make friends with any of these creatures, and when his heart aches with longing, he will curse me. Have I done all to keep the air fresh? Have I cared enough about the water? Have I left the eagle to soar in freedom? Have I done everything I could to earn my grandchild's fondness?
Chief Dan George, Tsleil-Waututh (Salish) Nation — (<http://www.whitewolfpack.com/2015/09/feed-your-spirit-19-words-of-wisdom-by.htm>, retrieved April 17, 2019.)
14. Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth. This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all.
Chief Seattle, Suquamish and Duwamish Nations — (https://www.azquotes.com/author/13252-Chief_Seattle. n.d.)

15. Heed the days
when the rain flows freely,
in their greyness
lies the seed of much thought.
The sky hangs low
and paints new colors
on the earth.
After the rain
the grass will shed its moisture,
the fog will lift from the trees,
a new light will brighten the sky
and play in the drops that hang on all things.
Your heart will beat out a new gladness,
--if you let it happen....
Chief Dan George, Tsleil-Waututh (Salish) Nation — (Dan George, *The Best of Chief Dan George*, Hancock House, British Columbia, 2004, pg. 19.)
16. Although we are in different boats, you in your boat and we in our canoe,
we share the same river of life.
Chief Oren Lyons, Ononga Leader, Faith Keeper of the Turtle Clan —
(Oren Lyons. AZQuotes.com, Wind and Fly LTD. https://www.azquotes.com/author/25765-Oren_Lyons, accessed April 16, 2019)
17. Be like a tree in pursuit of your cause. Stand firm, grip hard, thrust upward.
Bend to the winds of heaven. And learn tranquility.
Richard St. Barbe Baker, First Global Conservationist — (St. Barbe Baker, AZ Quotes.com, <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/841858>, accessed April 10, 2019.)
18. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection,
and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God's gifts!
Pope Francis — (Pope Francis (2017). "Embracing the Way of Jesus: Reflections from Pope Francis on Living Our Faith", p.64, Loyola Press)
19. Reveal to us, O God, Thine exalted eternity—that Thou hast ever been and will ever be, and that there is no God save Thee. Verily in Thee will we find comfort and strength.
Bahá'u'lláh — (Bahá'í Scriptures, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1928, p. 184)

LESSON PLAN

A BREATH OF LIFE FOR THE RAINFOREST: A WORKSHOP FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

By Teresa Henkle Langness

Synopsis

This workshop:

1. Presents the global role of the rainforest as the “lungs” of the world;
2. Outlines its current threats and status in terms of deforestation rate and contributor to climate change;
3. Presents the spiritual perspectives to problem-solving relevant to those threats;
4. Incorporates interfaith quotes that reinforce the timeliness of the call for unity, stewardship and, especially, inclusion of cultural minorities affected by environmental challenges that affect their own destiny;
5. Offers a chance for participants to briefly consider a role model from the Baha’i faith— Richard St. Barbe Baker— who took initiative, and to see through the lens of a particular group taking initiative to protect tropical forests;
6. Engages the working groups in seeking their similarities rather than their differences and working together to take authentic steps toward change; and
7. Ends the session with a celebration of oneness.

(The leader can delete certain steps and elements for reasons of timing or complexity or may extend the time allowed and conduct a longer workshop using the same materials. The article provided can also be offered as background reading, and the prayers in the additional prayer section can reinforce the workshop prayers while offering a longer supplication for personal meditation.)

Workshop Leader Advance Preparation

1. Preview the Resource pages below. Group dilemmas can be re-written or changed depending on your community’s reality.
2. Assemble Materials.
3. Cut word strips for eight readers, three prayer-givers and four working groups. (If you will be working with more than 28-32 participants, you may need to make a copy of the working group page, to assign duplicates to each working group.)
4. Assign speaking parts in advance, to save time in the workshop and allow practice of unfamiliar words for those speaking in a language other than their own. Translate difficult quotes in advance, if necessary, and allow them to read in the dominant language. If the entire workshop is offered in two languages, double the time allotted to it.

Materials

1. Markers or chalk to write on the blackboard or whiteboard
2. Paper (at least one large sheet per group)
3. Pens or pencils (four minimum)

WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Opening Prayers

[Two minutes]

1. I swear by Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm. Glorified art Thou, O God of all names. And Creator of the Heavens.
Bahá'u'lláh (1)
2. Reveal to us, O God, Thine exalted eternity—that Thou hast ever been and will ever be, and that there is no God save Thee. Verily in Thee will we find comfort and strength.
Bahá'u'lláh (2)

Learning Leader Introduction

[Five minutes]

Please close your eyes. Breathe in deeply. Hold your breath. Now let it out slowly. Think about the air traveling into your body, replenishing each cell with oxygen. Pause to feel gratitude for the air that keeps you alive. Exhale gently to share the breath of life with those around you.

The lifegiving resource of air belongs to all living things. As a tree sits on its bed of carbon dioxide, it exhales oxygen. Humans drink it up. We need our lungs to appreciate this exchange.

Picture our Amazon rainforest. Its large family of tropical plants slowly inhale the world's carbon, the emissions that heat up our climate and threaten the survival of communities. These same flora cleanse the air and exhale the life-giving oxygen that sustains each of our families over the generations. For this reason, people have called the rainforest the lungs of the world.

We protect our own lungs when we have a cold or a cough, purifying the air we breathe and bathing our throat with liquids. We try to get a little more rest than usual. Our body slows down and forces us to pay attention.

Our rainforest now begs for attention. Its growth has slowed with the loss of land and perked up through our efforts to replenish and hydrate its regrowth. For centuries, the people inhabiting each forest carefully took from it just what they needed and maintained the balance within these precious cradles of life. As the demands of modern civilization shifted, and the need to feed the world's population increased, we saw the resources of the rainforest choked off, the carbon emissions increase, and the oxygen decrease.

Migration patterns also shifted. The need for ranching and farming grew as populations rose. The world population requested more food. The need to protect World Heritage sites competed with the

economic growth and jobs that oil could bring to Latin American countries. Governments installed roads and hydro-dams. Forest management practices changed. The terrain itself posed challenges for reforestation practices.

Sometimes overconsumption drove the engine of environmental degradation. For instance, the increasing requests for tropical hardwoods and cheaper beef from abroad led to land use decisions based not only on need but on greed. The highest bidder held greater influence than the environmental impact advisors on the future of the rainforests.

With all these competing requests for space, the world's lungs cannot breathe as easily now. In fact, some scientists have said that climate change and deforestation may create a tipping point. The savannahs could replace the rain forests if deforestation exceeds 20 percent of its original area. (3)

In fewer than ten years, Latin America lost a hundred thousand square miles (260,000 square kilometers) of forest, affecting the carbon count in the air, the lush biodiversity in the forests, and the healthy relationship of many species interacting within the ecosystem. The carbon, once sequestered in the ground and in the plants, could no longer offset emissions quite so well or control the rise of global temperatures. This shift, in turn, contributed to the hardships of people within and far beyond our forest borders. As plants disappear from nature's menu, the rainforest will not properly serve its function as the world's lungs! (4)

A new study documented these changes across the Caribbean, Central and South America. It also noted the uncertainty of the impact of efforts to create change. Local initiatives can either stimulate or delay forest recovery efforts. (5) It is up to us to create positive change.

A Baha'i named Richard St. Barbe Baker set an unprecedented example for what it means to create that positive change. He began his reforestation efforts in 1922 and inspired the planting of twenty-

seven-thousand-million trees worldwide. He founded the Men of the Trees and, in 1982, launched the Decade of the Trees in Brazil, to slow the destruction of the rainforests. (6)

St. Barbe Baker had an affinity for planting trees. Assigned a role as a conservationist, he once came across a place called The Treeless Place, 17 miles from Nairobi. The Romans had moved in centuries earlier and begun farming wheat in the traditional way, thus creating a dust bowl, denuding the land of forests, eroding rich nutrients and inviting drought into the region. The generations of Arabs that followed raised goats, and the goats kept the trees from reemerging. When nomadic farmers then came to barter food for land, they also felled the trees, grew crops, and then moved on to denude more fertile land.

St. Barbe Baker thus first studied Africa in its state of disrepair and, as a forester, identified farming practices that mimic nature's natural preservation methods. For example, ground nuts can grow between trees to provide a natural form of irrigation. At night, the plants fold up, as the soil around them dampens with dew. The trees cool the upper air, dripping with enough moisture to replenish these dew ponds.

Using this natural system as a model, St. Barbe Baker wanted to use the intercropping method to create microclimates that protect the soil from erosion while replenishing or preserving its forests. He would need the help of the people to create successful agriculture on dryland and reforested areas on plains that had been overharvested. While working for the government, St. Barbe Baker stepped in to save an indigenous worker from being beaten by his supervisor, taking the blow himself instead. He was thus dismissed from his job and instead began to work independently with limited resources. He would work with the people to accomplish the goal of reforestation. In Kenya, he engaged the Kikuyus in dances, to celebrate the planting projects as acts of joy and unity. (7)

Today, the formidable challenges brought on by climate change make the stakes even higher, yet nature's models remain consistent. In an open letter to the British newspaper, The Guardian, on April 11, 2019, environmental advocates advised governments that:

“the best and cheapest way to avert a climate catastrophe is to heal nature by restoring and replanting degraded forests and by better conserving the natural world. ‘Defending the living world and defending the climate are, in many cases, one and the same. This potential has so far been largely overlooked,’ say the 23 signatories to the letter.”

The reduction of trees in the Amazon still has scientists today debating the evaporative effects of rainforest condensation on global climate change. (7) The latest theory emphasizes the role of leaf index transpiration. As pastures and soy plantations replace the forest's leafy canopy, the collective evaporation of leaf moisture is replaced by oceans as the major source of condensation, shifting patterns of wind, rain and temperature change. The sun's blazing hot rays, they say, may replace the equatorial drizzle that once fed the Amazon Basin, even up into the Andean peaks, until the region becomes a desert. A science writer noted:

[Five minutes]

Whereas the evaporative force over the canopy of a rainforest is considerably greater than that over the tropical ocean; that is no longer the case when the forest is gone.

... without the rainforest to recycle rain, precipitation will decline exponentially as one passes inland from the coast. (8)

People around the world have long wondered how their progeny will experience these climactic changes. Chief Dan George, of the Salish people, wrote in the last century:

The time will soon be here when my grandchild will long for the cry of a loon ... Have I done all I can to keep the air fresh? Have I cared enough about the water?... Have I done everything I could to earn my grandchild's fondness? (9)

Given these high-stakes changes, how can we care for our tropical forests—the lungs of the world, so essential to the health of the planet and to the health of the world's people?

With the help of the Divine Physician, we are the caregivers of the environment. Let's consider our sacred duty to help the patient. Our readers will share the Baha'i perspective:

Reading 1

Baha'u'llah taught the concept of moderation and respect for the Earth's resources. He also spoke out for the dignity and rights of each member of the human family and of each living thing. He described the beauties of nature continually in His writings, comparing them to the attributes of God. The Baha'i Faith presents three spiritual beliefs at the core of its perspective on the environment, as defined by the Baha'i Office of the Environment:

- Nature reflects the qualities of God and should, therefore, be greatly respected and cherished.
- All things are interconnected and flourish according to the law of reciprocity—their essential act of giving and receiving from one another.
- The oneness of humanity is the fundamental spiritual and social truth shaping our age. (10)

Reading 2

The principle of the oneness of humankind must become the ruling principle of international life. This principle does not seek to undermine national autonomy or suppress cultural or intellectual diversity. Rather, it makes it possible to view the climate change challenge through a new lens—one that perceives humanity as a unified whole, not unlike the cells of the human body, infinitely differentiated in form and function yet united in a common purpose which exceeds that of its component parts. (10)

Reading 3

To recognize the dignity of some seven billion individuals is to acknowledge a human reality that is truly universal. At the level of principle, there is widespread agreement that humanity constitutes a single people, albeit infinitely diverse in language, history, and cultural expression. (11)

Reading 4

...Indigenous peoples must have the right to participate fully and actively in their national societies and in decisions that affect them. Their participation will enrich the lives of their national communities. More importantly, it will allow them to guide their own destinies. (12)

Reading 5

...Economic development versus environmental sustainability—or top-down versus bottom-up approaches—often prove to be overly simplistic at best. Ultimately, they are not “won” by one side or the other. Rather, they must be transcended by a deeper understanding of the underlying realities of the broader situation. (13)

Reading 6

In order to advance the common good, individuals must possess both the capacity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing social structures and the freedom to choose between participating in those structures, working to reform them, or endeavoring to build new ones. (14)

Reading 7

“...every organized community ... enlisted under the banner of Baha'u'llah should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.” (15)

Reading 8

... and finally, cooperation between indigenous peoples and their governments is essential. In the Baha'i view, respect for different cultures can only be achieved if we are able to perceive, underlying our cultural variations, our essential unity as one human race. (16)

Introduce Group Work

[Allow 5 minutes for assembling and reassembling and at least 12 minutes for the activity. The step could be greatly expanded—if time permits, allow groups to make posters showing their steps.]

Let's imagine ourselves taking on the challenge of protecting the rain forest together, as a community.

1. First, please count off one through four and divide into four groups in each corner of the room.
2. Each group will read a quote from leaders of one of the world's religions provided below. You will consider whether the quote differs from or reinforces the messages we have already heard.
3. Next, please read about and discuss amongst yourselves the description of the specific problem your group faces.
4. Each group will prepare a spiritual response to the dilemma, writing down three steps the group will take to address the challenge.
5. Designate a spokesperson to share these steps with the larger audience.

[As the leader explains, assistants distribute paper and pens to each of four groups, along with one description and one interfaith quote per group. The quotes appear in the Resource Pages below. While the groups interact, the leader draws a Venn diagram on the board. Outside the circle, each corner contains the name of a working group: Agricultural Group, Transitional Group, Indigenous Group, or the Reforestation Group. Inside the overlapping space, allow room for certain steps-in-common to be rewritten. See the sample diagram in the Resource pages. Alternative group dilemmas can also be created.]

Group Discussion

[Allow at least 20 or up to 40 minutes]

Material: Use Group Dilemmas in the Resource Page below.

After most groups have finished, ask the groups to report out. A spokesperson from each group will describe their challenge and the steps they outlined. They mention whether and how they incorporated the inspiration from the quotes.

The leader or a scribe writes the steps in the Venn Diagram as the spokespeople present. Discuss any points of unity the group sees in terms of their needs, perspectives and points of action. Any common steps they will take are rewritten in the inner circles of the Venn Diagram.

Discuss, as a group, whether some of these steps could translate into a real plan of action. For example, did they favor a reforestation project to plant trees? An action to spread awareness of areas needing protection? A project to better monitor economic resources? To meet with civic leaders? A research project? An interfaith prayer vigil?

Did the groups share similar concerns? How did their challenges differ? Did the spiritual perspective influence their plan to move ahead? Did they share any part of the process? Make this the starting point for a brainstorm of realistic actions the group can take together. List a first step on the path to protecting the rainforest. [Write it on the board.] Does this step reflect a shared vision or shared spiritual perspective? If so, how?

[If feasible, schedule a follow-up meeting to advance the plan. Also encourage individual initiatives based on the spiritual principles studied within the framework of the workshop.]

Closing Ceremony

All stand and embrace, shoulder to shoulder, with arms outstretched around one another, as if protecting the rain forest inside. All take a shallow breath in and exhale deeply, representing the breathing of the “lungs of the world.”

If desired, remain in this position for a closing song and prayer.

Closing Song

The facilitator will know the inclinations of their first-line community in seeking inspiration through music and may initiate a traditional song for unity. Alternately, a round has been attached on the Resource Page below, allowing even non-musically inclined participants to remain in the huddle and sing in four parts, numbered according to their work groups. A Spanish translation is included. If the group knows the song, Allah’u’Abha (“God is most Glorious”), they may also want to add a chorus of this song at the end of the session.

Closing Prayer

O my God! O my God! Verily, I invoke Thee and supplicate before Thy threshold, asking Thee that all Thy mercies may descend upon these souls. Specialize them for Thy favor and Thy truth.

O Lord! Unite and bind together the hearts, join in accord all the souls, and exhilarate the spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O Lord! Make these faces radiant through the light of Thy oneness. Strengthen the loins of Thy servants in the service of Thy kingdom.

O Lord, Thou possessor of infinite mercy! O Lord of forgiveness and pardon! Forgive our sins, pardon our shortcomings, and cause us to turn to the kingdom of Thy clemency, invoking the kingdom of might and power, humble at Thy shrine and submissive before the glory of Thine evidences.

O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord! Dilate the breasts through the signs of Thy oneness, and make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life. Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver, the Forgiving, the Pardoner, the Omniscient, the One Creator. (17)

RESOURCES FOR “A BREATH OF LIFE FOR THE RAINFOREST” WORKSHOP

1. Group Dilemmas

Agricultural Group

Economic development is important for the growth of the people. Farms and ranches have replaced rain forests over a wide area. Many people eat the meat the ranchers produce. Some farms bring their grazing animals into the orchards and pastures, to help regenerate the soil. As you look at the changing landscape, you wonder, are we balancing the economic needs of the world and the need to protect the rainforest? How can we do better? What other industries have the same feeling you do? Is there room for everyone? What impact will our choices have on the tropical forests? Make a three-step plan to find greater balance.

Indigenous Group

Your people practiced cultural ceremonies that emphasized the sacred nature of the rain forest. Your fishing, food-gathering and hunting practices were passed down for many years. Because you had no formal ownership of the land, the government chose to build a system of roads in areas sacred to your people. They now want to construct a water reservoir. What will you say in a declaration of beliefs to persuade them to move the roads and dam sites to protect the tropical rainforests? Who can help? Make a three-step plan.

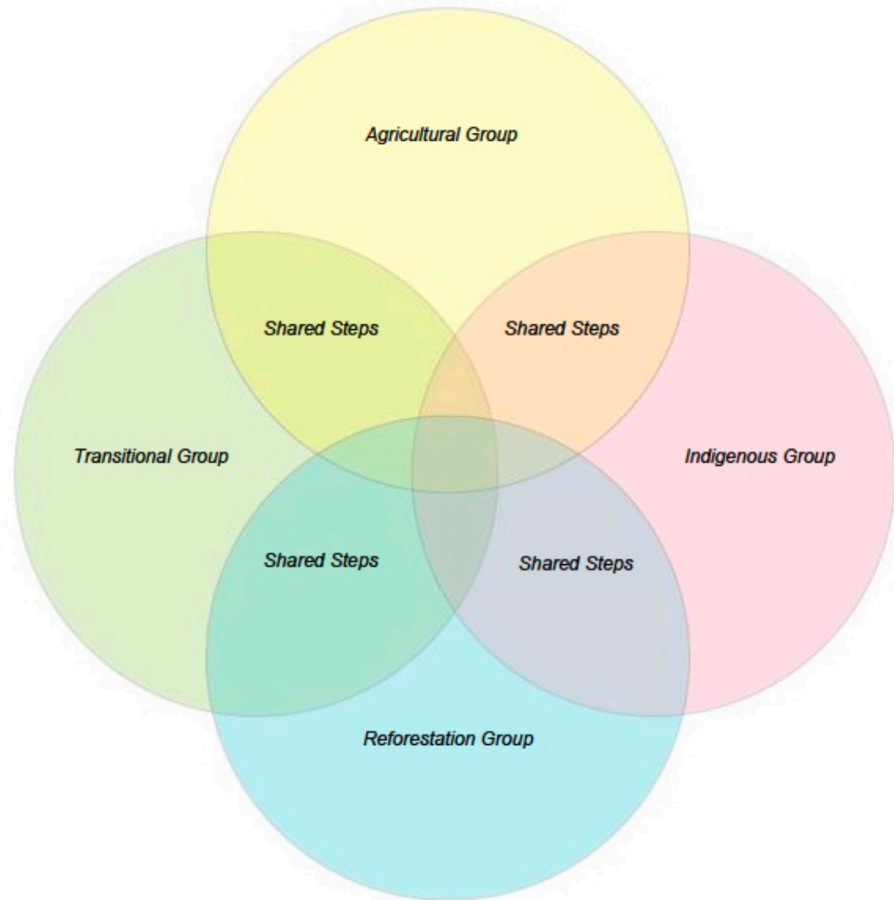
Group in Transition

You represent a group of rainforest dwellers who once preserved the careful balance of nature. Some of your people migrated to another place to feed their families. Others have worked with faith groups and community leaders to introduce a successful reforestation project. Climate scientists now work in the area to conduct plant studies and to research theories about climate change and rain forest conservation. Some of the local industries have resisted working with them, so they might move to another community where they feel less resistance. You want to reengage them, integrating science and indigenous ways, to make sure the ideas the local people have explored over centuries are heard. How will you reach out to ensure that everyone has a voice about the protection of the rainforests? Make a three-step plan.

Reforestation Group

Your group is working hard to reforest a region. A young man has told you of his success in planting thousands of trees and watching the flora return to the area. Excited to recreate this area, the group has considered how to collect young starts for re-plantings. Steep hillsides in some areas have made it difficult to access the areas you want to replant. You will need the help of local people familiar with the landscape, or agile young people, and you will also need the cooperation of ranchers and an oil company willing to reallocate some of their land. How will you unite all these groups? Make a three-step plan, but before you do, consider the wisdom of the elders. One of your spiritual leaders points out that no one can recreate millions of years of evolution nor restore the gifts of the rainforest in one lifetime. How will his wisdom affect your approach?

2. Sample Venn Diagram



3. Interfaith Quotes

[Eight quotes appear below, in case you split your audience into duplicate sets of the four working groups. Distribute one quote per group.]

- a. Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war, and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together.
- Sheikh Ali Gomaa, Islamic Grand Mufti of Egypt
- b. The maternal sea is polluted, the heavens are rent, the forests are being destroyed and the desert areas are increasing. We must protect creation. Better yet, we must embellish it, render it spiritual, transfigure it. But nothing will be done unless there is a general conversion of men's minds and hearts. -Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch, (1921-2012) A Theology of Creation
- c. Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth. "This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. – Chief Seattle
- d. What will future generations say of us, who leave them a degraded planet as our legacy? How will we face our Lord and Creator? - The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change

- e. We now face the unprecedented challenge of climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions, and the need for serious and urgent action on this issue has never been clearer.
- 2009 Resolution of the Commission on Social Action to the Union for Reform Judaism
- f. “Through greed, we have established an economy that destroys the web of life. We have changed our climate and drown in despair. Let oceans of justice flow. May we learn to sustain and renew the life of our Mother Earth. - Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s Prayer for the Climate
- g. All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
That we may protect life and beauty..
- From Pope Francis’s Encyclical on Climate Change and Equality

4. Song

Round: Forest Protection

Repeat the song three to five times, as a chant.

In English:

O, God, protect our forest canopy.
We raise our voices in harmony and unity.

En Español:

Oh Dios, protege el bosque que nos das.
Levantamos nuestras voces, una y todas.
(O God, protect the forest you give us.
We raise our voices, one and all.)

Lyrics by Teresa Henkle Langness

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