

World Environment Day: The climate crisis and the need for inner awakening

By **Acharya Prashant** - June 1, 2025



On June 5th each year, the world commemorates World Environment Day. The occasion invites reflection and introspection. We must ask: has it become just another ritual, well-intentioned yet lacking practical impact? A ritual without transformation slips into mere performance.

We know of the environmental crisis—climate change, mass extinction of species, rampant deforestation, and toxified air and oceans. Yet even as these warnings grow louder, we return to the same patterns everyday. We lament the planet's condition while continuing to pursue our destructive desires, indulging in pointless consumption, and ravaging natural resources. This being our deliberate pattern, special days take the purpose of planned expiation for guilt – an hour or two of hashtags and symbolic gestures. The ego receives a temporary fix of redemption, and the destruction continues unmitigated.

Let's be honest: the world doesn't need sympathy or poetic speeches. It requires a deep, inner revolution. Not noisy slogans, but a rethinking of our daily living. Not eco-friendly commercials, but a genuine examination of the roots of our violent patterns of compulsive consumption.

Climate Change Is Not Just About the Climate

Climate change is often discussed as a scientific or environmental issue, but at its core, it reflects something much deeper. Climate change is not only a carbon emission-induced scientific phenomenon but fundamentally a reflection of human discontent, ignorance, and disconnection. It is not nature that is in rebellion; rather, it is the human mind that is succumbing to the burden of its compulsions.

It will require much more than policy or technological change to save the planet. It will require a shift in human consciousness. Those who ignore their inner turmoil and live

without self-awareness are bound to consume nature, relationships, and everything else along the way. As long as there's no change in the inner weather, the outer world will remain in peril.

Let's make World Environment Day more than a symbolic celebration. Let it be a day not of performative sloganeering, but of honest review of the foundation of our lifestyles. That's where true awareness begins, and real change follows.

The Climate Crisis Is a Symptom, Not the Cause

Climate change cannot be addressed in a psychological vacuum. It is not a question of rising temperatures or melting ice caps alone. It is the cumulative result of centuries of misplaced priorities and blind ambition. Wildfires, dead seas, and melting ice caps are external symptoms of profound internal unrest in the human psyche. Where inner peace is lost, material excess takes its place. The upheaval that we see in nature is a reflection of our own inner imbalance.

Average global temperature has risen by about 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels due to human activities. This has led to a stunning rise in the frequency of extreme weather events, deterioration of ecosystems, and existential risks for island nations. Coral reefs are bleaching, Arctic permafrost is thawing, and sea levels are rising.

These are not just environmental warnings—they are reflections of a deeper existential issue. A mind driven by mindless consumption will inevitably devastate the planet.

Revisiting the Origins: How Did We Go Wrong?

Technological progress has empowered human beings in so many ways. We listen to scientists and innovators — even if only because they give us the means and technology to fulfill our desires. However, we have not listened to the philosophers, thinkers and seers who have pointed towards the futility of pursuit of desire. That's where we have gone wrong. We have much more economic and technological power than we have wisdom.

We drill, dominate, disfigure and destroy — refusing to acknowledge the consequences. We talk of sustainability, yet continue to live unsustainable lives. We promote green energy without questioning the culture of limitless consumption that fuels the need for it. Climate change is not out there — it is rather the externalized manifestation of an internal disorder.

The world is a mirror of the mind. A conflicted world reflects a conflicted consciousness. No policy or technology can bring lasting transformation unless we first begin by studying and understanding our own thought and desire patterns.

The Collapse of Earth's Natural Climate Regulators

Nature sustains life through intricate ecological processes—forests, wetlands, oceans, and soils. Forests absorb nearly a third of fossil fuel carbon emissions. Oceans absorb more than 90% of the excess heat from greenhouse gases.

However, these systems now stand severely destroyed. Emissions, deforestation, and overpopulation have irreversibly undermined the Earth's capacity to regulate itself. As ecosystems deteriorate, climate instability increases. Heatwaves have become more intense, rainfall has become increasingly unpredictable, and habitats have disappeared, resulting in a catastrophic decline in biodiversity.

Bad Philosophy of Life

Today's model of economic growth, centered on ever-increasing demand, feeds on ecological collapse. In sectors such as energy, agriculture, transport, and industry,

production is directly tied to environmental degradation and social injustice.

Global greenhouse gas emissions now exceed 58 gigatons annually, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels for electricity, industry, travel and animal agriculture. These sectors release vast quantities of carbon dioxide—the chief driver of climate change.

As we ask, “Can this continue without consequences?”, we come to an uncomfortable fact: most of the excess energy usage that causes emissions is actually pleasure-seeking usage.

But who is driving this indulgence? Not all energy consumption is equal, nor is its impact. A closer look at global emission patterns exposes a profound disparity between those who emit the most and those who suffer the most.

The wealthiest nations, possessing the most means and knowledge, contribute disproportionately to the crisis. Today, per capita annual emissions vary widely: the EU emits around 7 tons, the US 16 tons, and oil-rich nations like Saudi Arabia and the UAE emit between 20 and 25 tons per person.

The top 0.1% — some of the world’s most admired figures — symbols of success — emit over 1,000 tons per person annually. In stark contrast, the bottom 50% of the world emits just 5%, yet bears the harshest consequences: floods, droughts, hunger, displacement, etc. In the last decade, the top 1% of global emitters were responsible for 1.3 million premature deaths by emitting over 20 times the sustainable share, mostly in vulnerable regions like the global South, including India.

From Admiration to Awareness

Ironically, many of these global emitters are also the people we idolize. We admire those who live in luxury, glorify unbridled success, and aspire to lifestyles that are, in truth, ecocidal. The very individuals and corporations who drive climate breakdown are hailed as inspirations—actors, influencers, tycoons, and political leaders whose lives rest on vast consumption and systemic exploitation.

If the role models we celebrate are themselves the biggest contributors to environmental destruction, what future can we expect? If we continue to buy their products, mimic their lifestyles, vote for their interests—how do we expect to save the planet?

The climate crisis is not a distant phenomenon—it lives in the choices we make every day and the ideals we uphold in our culture. To heal the planet, we must stop glorifying those who are wounding it.

Vedanta teaches that action without self-awareness is mere noise—impulsive and destructive. Only a mind that is free, uncoerced, and rooted in self-knowledge can perceive reality clearly and respond wisely.

Let World Environment Day not be another fleeting ritual. Let it signal a real shift in consciousness—from consumption to contemplation, from imitation to insight. Let this day remind us: the crisis lies within us and so does the cure.

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