

## Climate Crisis: A Mirror to Our Inner State

Technology alone cannot save us; true change demands inner clarity and honest self-reflection. As the Earth faces critical tipping points, the call to action is clear – healing the planet begins with understanding ourselves

**FIRST**  
**Column**



The planet is warming at a rate faster than at any point in recorded history. In 2024, global temperatures reached the highest levels ever observed. NASA confirmed what many of us already felt: the heatwaves, floods, and storms were not isolated events but symptoms of a deeper shift. Temperatures rose 1.3 degrees Celsius above the 20th-century average. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has climbed past 420 ppm, compared to just 278 ppm before the Industrial Revolution.

The oceans are soaking up much of this heat, but even they are now showing signs of strain. Sea levels are rising as glaciers and ice sheets melt. Antarctica is losing ice at a rapid pace. According to UNESCO, glaciers worldwide have lost around 9,000 Gigatons of ice since 1975. That's not just a number; it means disrupted freshwater sources, rising seas, and climate systems knocked off balance.

The situation is no longer about preventing climate change. It is already here. The question now is: How deep will it go?

### What Drives the Crisis Beneath the Surface?

Most people are aware of carbon emissions and rising temperatures, but there's a layer beneath these surface events that's even more concerning. It's the presence of feedback loops, natural processes that reinforce the changes we are already seeing.

A feedback loop is when one change causes another, which then fuels the first. This kind of self-reinforcing cycle is what makes climate change so dangerous. Once started, these loops are almost impossible to stop, and many of them are already in motion.

#### Some of the Most Alarming Feedback Loops

##### 1. Ice-Albedo feedback

When ice and snow melt, they reveal darker surfaces underneath, like ocean water or soil. These darker surfaces absorb more sunlight than ice does, which increases warming and leads to more melting. This effect is visible in the Arctic, where summer sea ice is shrinking at an alarming pace, to an extent that by 2030 we may see entirely ice-free summers.

##### 2. Thawing Permafrost

Permafrost holds vast amounts of methane. As it thaws, methane is released, which causes more warming, leading to more thawing. This is already happening in places like Siberia. It's a cycle that's difficult to break and extremely damaging not just to sea levels but also to ocean circulation, climate and biodiversity as a whole.

##### 3. Water Vapour Increase

Warmer air holds more water vapour. Water vapour is itself a greenhouse gas, so the more water vapour, the more heat is trapped. This, in turn, raises temperatures further, causing even more evaporation.



ACHARYA PRASHANT

##### 4. Forest Loss

Forests absorb carbon dioxide, but as heatwaves and droughts increase, so do wildfires. Trees die or burn, releasing the carbon they had stored. Many forests are no longer absorbing carbon; some are now emitting it. This is true for parts of the Amazon, which used to be a major carbon sink.

##### 5. Ocean Heat and Carbon Uptake

The warmer the ocean, the less carbon dioxide it can absorb. At the same time, warm water expands, raising sea levels. Ocean ecosystems also suffer. Coral reefs bleach, marine life declines, and the ocean's ability to balance the climate weakens.

##### 6. Soil Degradation

Warmer temperatures lead to faster breakdown of organic matter in soil. This releases more carbon into the atmosphere and reduces the soil's ability to support life.

##### 7. Weakening Ocean Circulation

Melting ice adds freshwater to the oceans, disturb-

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ing important ocean currents. One of these is the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, which affects weather across the world. If it slows down too much, global climate systems could be thrown into chaos.

##### 8. Ocean Stratification

As the surface of the ocean warms, the mixing between surface and deep water slows down. This stops the circulation of nutrients and reduces the ocean's ability to absorb carbon dioxide, weakening its role as a climate regulator.

##### 9. Biodiversity Collapse

Shifting temperatures, disrupted rainfall, and disappearing habitats are causing mass species extinction. Forests, oceans, and grasslands are losing species at a pace never seen before. As species vanish, the ecosystems they support begin to collapse, which further reduces the Earth's resilience to climate shocks.

### The Inner Crisis Behind the Outer Collapse

Climate change is not just about data and systems.

It reflects something deeper: the confusion in the human mind. We are not just harming the planet by accident. We are driven by wants we do not understand, chasing comfort, status, or identity without pausing to ask: What do we need?

Vedantic wisdom teaches that the world we see reflects our state of being. If we are restless inside, our actions will be restless too. When we feel empty, we try to fill that inner void by taking more from the world. This gives rise to overconsumption, pollution, and disregard for all life.

The climate crisis, then, is not separate from us. It is not a problem happening "out there." It begins with how we live, how we think, and what we believe brings us happiness.

### Why Technology Alone Won't Save Us

Many solutions are being proposed: electric vehicles, carbon capture, and geoengineering. These may help slow things down, but they cannot address the root problem. We are not in trouble because we lack tools. We are in trouble because we lack clarity.

Our technologies are shaped by our priorities. If our minds are unclear, our tools will reflect that confusion. We will end up using green technology to continue the same old patterns of greed and excess, only now with solar panels on top.

Lasting change can only come when there is inner clarity. The Bhagavad Gita says that right action arises from self-knowledge. If we act from ignorance, our actions, no matter how well-meaning, will still cause harm.

### A Chance for Real Change

Many scientists believe we are close to crossing irreversible tipping points. But the window for change is still open. What matters now is not just speed, but sincerity. Are we willing to look at ourselves honestly? Are we ready to ask hard questions about how we live?

This is not about rejecting modern life. It is about bringing attention and insight to it. It is about asking whether we are truly living well, or merely rushing from one desire to another.

We are going to act anyway. The real question is, are we acting out of understanding or just our old confusion? Clarity is more powerful than mere urgency. And real change begins when we stop, observe, and inquire.

The planet will survive. It always has. But whether human life can continue in any meaningful way is still an open question. If the Earth is in trouble, it is because we are. To restore order outside, we must first come to clarity within. That is the invitation in front of us. Not just to save the world, but to understand ourselves. And if we look closely, it will be clear that the two are not so different after all.

(The writer is a Vedanta exegete and philosopher, is the founder of the Prashant Advait Foundation. Views are personal)