

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

-- Vyasa Prasad --

One is beyond what can be counted,
the other is ordinary; other than these two there is not any other form
existing in waking, or in dream,
or in some city of the gods; this is certain.

Atmopadesa Satakam V. 67 (Narayana Guru)

The Tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.

The unnameable is the eternally real
Naming is the origin
of all particular things.

Tao Te Ching, V.1 (Lao Tzu)

There was a door to which I found no key,
There was a veil past which I could not see,
Some little talk awhile of me and thee,
There seem'd -- and then no more of thee and me.

Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam V. 32

When Self-knowledge (atma-vidya) shrinks,
then ignorance is fearful;
substantiation by name and form,
in the most terrible fashion, looms here, ghostlike.

Darshana Mala, Ch.1 V.7 (Narayana Guru)

Earth is the Mother; and we are her children.

Atharva Veda

Preliminaries - Wishful Thinking

It is ironic that scientific progress has led us to an age when an impending apocalypse has become a unifying force. This enantiodromia is an opportunity to move forward towards the greater challenge of understanding consciousness -- the inner environment, or inner landscape, that is shared by all of humanity. The cosmos and the psychos are interlaced to create the grand universe, understood objectively "out there" and subjectively "within" by all sentient beings.

It is very heartening that world leaders gathered at the United Nations summit on Climate Change. The warnings of scientists based on the data from highly sophisticated instruments complemented and corresponded with the experience of common humanity. Climate change has been given due recognition at the highest of international forums. Let us hope that pledges will be honored, ushering in a new era where influential governments will become leaders in reversing the effects of global warming. This augurs well for the UN Climate-Change Summit in Copenhagen at the end of the year.

Technophiles are pleased with Google Earth's announcement that it is adding new features that will allow users to "view" any location on earth up till the year 2100, according to both the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's high and low emissions scenarios. This feature empowers every desktop and laptop computer user to become a Climate Change monitor.

Backward Glances - Causal Speculation

Emerging out of the Dark Ages the thinkers of the 18th century European Enlightenment laid the foundation for the scientific revolution that would transform the entire world. The shackles of dogma had already been weakened by Copernicus and Giordano Bruno. But as reason gained ascendancy over faith, a schism developed between spirit and matter. The philosophies of Descartes, Locke and Newton encouraged materialists to dominate nature with their culture and dominate feelings with reason. Matter came under the purview of the scientists, while spirit was relegated to the realm of religious experiences. The physical world investigated with empirical instruments became the domain of science, while the metaphysical realm beyond the reach of measurement became the concern of religions. The divorce of faith from reason sowed the seeds for conflict centuries later.

Western desire and means to control and dominate nature gradually spread around the world through the industrial revolution, international trade and colonization. In due course the schism between spirit and matter became established in the minds of leading thinkers of the modern era,

and the "objective" "demonstrable" and the "a posteriori" came to be accepted as the most reliable form of knowledge. Seeing is believing.

The East never created a schism between the world of experience and the realm of transcendence. Both were understood as two aspects of the same Ultimate Reality. The Rishis of the Upanishads composed rhapsodic hymns in praise of the Supreme Spirit, which is at once the transcendental and the immanent. The objective world of experience is a projection of one's own consciousness. We see what we believe.

Thus the cultures of the East and the West developed two civilizations: that which resonates and is one with all earthly manifestations, and that which denies sentience, spirit and psyche to all elements exterior to humankind.

In *The Relation of the Individual to the Universe*, Tagore writes, "The civilization of ancient Greece was nurtured within city walls. In fact, all the modern civilizations have their cradles of brick and mortar. These walls leave their mark deep in the minds of men. They set up a principle of 'divide and rule' in our mental outlook, which begets in us a habit of securing all our conquests by fortifying them and separating them from one another. We divide nation and nation, knowledge and knowledge, man and nature. It breeds in us a strong suspicion of whatever is beyond the barriers we have built, and everything has to fight hard for its entrance into our recognition."

In contrast to the civilizations of brick and mortar we have the way of the rishis and druids living in forest hermitages or wandering freely, neither sowing nor reaping, nor storing in barns, living in absolute freedom, sustained by the benevolence of Providence. It was from these forest communities and desert retreats that the wisdom heritage of the world emerged. Wisdom teachers have continuously affirmed the oneness of consciousness, happiness, knowledge, god and the Self. These are not disjunct values, but aspects of one essence.

In the light of Tagore's observation, modern democracy is inherently flawed in favor of urban dwellers and the culture of opulence. Neurotheology, an emerging interdisciplinary field of neurological and spiritual studies, is demonstrating that the human brain is uniquely constructed to perceive and generate spiritual realities. Left to themselves humans are naturally spiritual, while the influence of urbanization might actually fracture spiritual capability. Natural spirituality corresponds with the Upanishadic dictum, *Tat Tvam Asi*, "That Thou Art" and the principle of the *via negativa* followed by the 6th century mystic Dionysius the Areopagite and the Vedantins of India as well as the *Negative Education* of Rousseau.

Epistemological Framework

An overall epistemology takes both the Beyond and the Ordinary together into consideration and deals with the problem in a wholesale manner, rather than dealing with a piecemeal annexation of one aspect disjunct from the whole. We cannot treat the problem as an event "out there" without a corresponding awareness "in here". Contemporary lifestyle has interfered with natural laws and so climate change may be considered as the outer manifestation of an inner ethical problem of human beings.

Many insights are shrouded in the *lingua mystica* of the ancients and need to be restated in the *lingua scientific* of the modern world. In this task we are confronted with a very fundamental problem -- that of the alphabet itself. David Abram in his book "The Spell of the Sensuous" blames the invention of the phonetic alphabet for triggering a trend towards increasing abstraction and alienation from nature. He writes, "Only as the written text began to speak would the voices of the forest, and of the river, begin to fade. And only then would language loosen its ancient association with the invisible breath, the spirit sever itself from the wind, the psyche dissociate itself from the environing air." Another author, Leonard Shlain in his book "The Alphabet Verses The Goddess" points out the difference between images which are concrete and are perceived in an all-at-once manner, and alphabets which are abstract, with symbols arranged in a linear sequence. To perceive images the brain uses wholeness, simultaneity and synthesis. To get the meaning of alphabetic writing the brain relies on sequence, analysis and abstraction. Both authors agree that alphabetical writing altered the neurobiology of the brain to sever human connection with the natural world. The poet and the artist is able to capture the essence, while the scientist struggles in vain. While technology has created a new culture of virtual spaces and mass communication, there is a silver lining in the reemergence of symbolic language through cinema, television and computer graphics. We see rudimental symbolic language in the use of the color scheme in traffic lights and identical icons on signboards in airports across the world. Power Point presentations have become ubiquitous. In these instances symbolism offers a new language of secularism. We may be at the threshold of another neurobiological transformation, this time by reviving the ancient human relationship with symbols.

The iconography and symbolic pictographs of the ancient world used protolanguage based on images. These cultures are known to be egalitarian, natural, with considerable harmony between the genders. One of the best examples of such an egalitarian society is the Harappan civilization. The anthropologist Jonathan Kenoyer has studied the Indus Valley Civilization, and he writes, "The Indus cities did not grow up around a central palace or temple, as was common with other early states. There is no evidence of elite burials filled with material wealth. Perhaps the most striking feature is the small amount of evidence for military conflict and not a single

depiction of warfare or captive taking...From these early times, people decided how to organize their settlements, how to interact with other communities, how to resolve conflicts, what to do with surplus food and wealth and how to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next." They used images extensively in the form of seals and symbols (which are yet to be deciphered). Today we can experience the mystique of iconography in statues of the dancing Nataraja, among many others.

In the Indian philosophical tradition there are four means of obtaining valid knowledge. 1. Direct Perception; 2. Inference; 3. Comparison; and 4. Word Testimony. The first three means are useful in the transactional world while a priori word testimony, shabda, is the means to gain transcendental knowledge.

Like students of mathematics willing to accept the abstract notion "x", let us accept the a priori normative notion that the Eternal Spirit pervades the universe, including the individual self. The Isavasya Upanishad says, "Isavasya idam sarvam" the Lord pervades all this. The spirit is indestructible pure consciousness, beyond the reach of climate change or global warming. This is the One Beyond of Narayana Guru, the Eternal Tao of the Taoists, and the Mysterium Tremendum of Omar Khayyam. Nothing can bring about the destruction of This which knows no decrease, according to the Bhagavad Gita (Ch.2 v.17.)

Having established our a priori foundation, let us now deal with our a posteriori knowledge of climate change and the looming apocalypse of global warming. This is the realm of the ordinary of Guru Narayana, the place of a little talk of me and thee of Khayyam, and the realm of particular things of the Taoists. This is where we find ourselves when Self-Knowledge shrinks. This is the world where we seek our daily bread.

Methodology

Dialectical thinking is a methodology that takes both the counterparts in a situation into consideration. The activist on the street is the counterpart of the meditator seated in a Zendo. One is active, the other is contemplative. Counterparts are cancelled by intuitively understanding the common ground where they unite, which is in their intentionality and their goal. The meeting point is a non-polarized neutral position where the opposites cancel each other out. The transcendent (One beyond) and the immanent (the ordinary) intersect and function in and through the living experience of every person. One cannot escape into the transcendental spirit and at the same time continue his or her existential life. Neither can existential life be devoid of the transcendental element. Thus as environmental pollution is reduced, the transcendental spirit is enhanced in the here and now.

Spiritual Resources

Our first resource is abhaya, fearlessness. We resolve to be courageous and use our creative intelligence. The only thing to fear is fear itself.

The second resource is satyam, truth. A transparent vision should guide our understanding. Truth should be the foundation of thought, word and deed. A corollary to truth is dharma, the innate principle that gives integrity to everything.

The third resource is jnana, knowledge. We must have reliable sources of knowledge so that half-baked notions and superstition are kept at abeyance. The world we experience is not real as such, but a phenomena created by the relationship between coexisting opposing forces. The blue of the sky, for instance, does not exist, per se. It is a phenomena generated by the interaction between invisible rays of light with invisible particles in the atmosphere. When the sun is near the horizon, light rays elongate and blue turns to red. We cannot see the invisible photons or atmospheric particles which are the cause, and we see only the effect which is the blue color of the sky. Climate change is an effect that is thought to have an anthropogenic cause. Interdisciplinary thinking is better than compartmentalized specialization. Buckminster Fuller said that specialization precludes comprehensive thinking.

The fourth resource is ahimsa, non-violence. Human beings should respect nature and hold all natural processes in awe and reverence. Nature is a symbiotic interactive system. Interdependence is the modus operandi. Her hierarchy develops from simple structures to intricate complexity in a spiraling centrifugal manner. Nature is self-replicating and proliferates manifoldly. It is a self-governing and self-regulating system, with inbuilt homeostasis and cybernetic feedback loops that affect self-correction. Paradoxically, nature functions in a perennial state of imbalance. It is therefore impossible to control nature and unwise to interfere with her inherent intelligence.

The fifth resource is tapas, effort. All accomplishments require sustained effort. One should not feel disheartened and be willing to apply oneself diligently until the goal is attained.

The sixth resource is damyata, self-restraint. Restrain the addiction to control and dominate, and restrain the urge to enjoy at the expense of the environment or by exploiting fellow human beings. Aggressive extroversion needs to be tempered with sobering introversion. The ego creates a boundary by assuming the role of knower, doer and enjoyer.

The seventh resource is datta, being charitable. Sharing and giving spreads wealth. A need based system of equitable distribution should replace the current economic model propped with

banking cartels and unfair trading practices. There is enough food to feed the world and enough goods to cater to everybody's needs. Economic imbalances need to be set right for a just and fair world.

The eighth resource is *daya*, compassion. Human transactions should be touched with an element of kindness and compassion. Cruelty to the planet, plants and animals and to ourselves and fellow human beings should be sublimated into a compassionate attitude towards all sentient and non-sentient beings.

The ninth resource is *saundarya*, beauty. Nature is beautiful. The starry heavens above, the snowy mountains below, the colorful flora and the captivating fauna around us are alluring. Aesthetics should infuse our sensory world, elevating our consciousness and refining our emotions. The artist Paul Gauguin lamented, "There is always a heavy demand for fresh mediocrity. In every generation the least cultivated taste has the largest appetite." Quality rather than quantity should be the norm.

The tenth resource is *tyaga*, relinquishment. Ultimately everything passes away and perishes. Instead of clinging and holding on, it is wise to let go of things and ideas that have served their usefulness. Static and closed attitudes should transform into dynamic and open states of mind.

Conclusion

Lasting peace at the personal and interpersonal levels is the ideal foundation for human happiness and well being. Meaning is important to satisfy the spiritual nature of human beings. Our answers have to be in the context of the perennial questions of Why are we here? Where have we come from? and Where are we going? Only by addressing the ultimate questions do we find the final solution.