

EARTH I LOVE

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Nature is the real source of our wealth.

IF WE WANT to bring about a transformation in the way our society is run and in our attitudes to other living things on the Earth we need to differentiate between the problem and its symptoms. For example at the moment everybody is talking about global warming but global warming is not the problem – it is a symptom of the problem and we need to go deeper than just to talk about treating the symptoms of global warming. It is a characteristic of modern times to look at how to treat the symptoms, rather than to tackle the real reasons as to why we are changing the whole atmosphere that sustains us.

Sir Nicholas Stern has written a 600 page review on climate change but it does not go deep enough into the reasons underlying the position we now find ourselves in – how did we manage to reach the stage where we are sawing the branch of the tree upon which we are sitting? The answer is that we have lost the idea of the spirit and we have just concentrated on matter; we have become wedded to the religion of materialism. But matter is no matter unless it has spirit. Matter on its own is useless. A human body is made up of head, arms and legs but it is of no use without the human spirit; the body serves no purpose unless it has a spirit to bring it to life.

In the last few hundred years a number of Western philosophers and scientists such as Descartes and Newton looked upon the Earth as an object of human dominance. We have come to believe that humans are the master race, the super species in charge of the Earth. Over the years we have tried to rid ourselves of many of the ‘-isms’, such as imperialism, nationalism and sexism, but now we are in a world of species-ism, where we think that the human species is special and that humans are in charge of all else. We used to own slaves but now we own Nature; in our view nature has no rights and we can claim possession of natural things wherever we can. But the moment we have a different world view and we see Nature not as dead matter but as a living thing, then suddenly we are in a deep relationship with the natural world. Then we recognise that nature rights are equal to human rights.

In fact humans are also an integral part of Nature. The Latin word ‘*natal*’ means ‘born’ and is the root for the word ‘nature’ and words relating to birth of humans such as ‘prenatal’ and ‘postnatal’. Similarly we refer to ‘native Africans’ meaning those who were born and lived there. So, natal, native, nativity and nature are made of the same word. We are part of Nature and not owners of

Nature, we do not own the trees, the land and the rivers, we have a relationship with them.

The idea, prevalent in modern economics, that we human beings own Nature and can therefore treat her as we like, is fundamentally flawed. Unless we can change this idea and make a fundamental shift from the ownership of Nature to a relationship with Nature, global warming will never come to an end. Even if we change from burning fossil fuels to generating power in other ways – whether wind power, solar generation, nuclear energy or using biofuels – all we are doing is treating the symptoms. If we think we can control the rivers, the animals and the rainforest based on the ideas of separation from and ownership of Nature, then all our efforts towards sustainability are just an illusion. Technological solutions have to be balanced by psychological transformation.

There is a big difference between ownership and relationship. There was a time when men thought they could own women; this idea we have managed to change and now we know you cannot own your wife; it is a relationship not ownership. There was also a time when people owned slaves and wealth was measured by the number of slaves in a household. But the idea still remains that the forests, land and the animals are our slaves. We put animals into the factory farms and cages. We treat them and use them as we like. As long as this mindset – this anthropocentric view – continues, global warming is not going to go away. We need to make a quantum leap from an anthropocentric worldview to a geocentric worldview.

We need to accept the intrinsic value of all life, human life as well as other than human life. Human community is part of the Earth community. Economy has to operate in harmony with ecology. This change of worldview as well as a change of heart has to come about from the bottom up, from the grassroots. We have to build a people's movement to create a culture of ecology.

We can live in an illusion thinking that the governments should do something about global warming but the reality is that the world will never be free of global warming unless people change their relationship with the Earth. We are guests of the Earth and we should be the friends of the Earth. The Buddha was the first friend of the Earth. He gave up all his possessions to sit under a tree and said that we are all related to the Earth; the whole Earth is our family, all creatures are our kith and kin.

IN THE WESTERN world we follow fashions and the current fashion is to talk about climate change. In the 1960s the fashion was to talk about nuclear war. When I met Bertrand Russell (then aged 92) I said “Lord Russell, you are my inspiration but I have one problem with your philosophy, and that is that your agenda on nuclear war is driven by fear”.

The same is happening with the mounting public awareness of climate change – it is driven by fear, fear of the loss of the consumerist way of life and of our material possessions. It is fear that is driving much of the environmental movement. As I pointed out to Bertrand Russell “peace is a way of life – peace does not come from fear of nuclear weapons”. In the same way sustainability is also a way of life – it is not something we do just to save our possessions. We have to move away from the mindset of fear. Our environmentalism should be inspired by love of life, love of communities, love of people, love of the Earth and love of Nature. The Buddha was an environmentalist 2,600 years ago before there was any global warming; he sat under a tree seeking enlightenment and said ‘we must have love for the tree’. But nowadays we don’t sit under the tree; instead we think ‘how can I use the tree for my profit – how can I make money out of it or how can I build my house or make my furniture with it?’ For the Buddha, the tree was sacred, it had intrinsic value, but for Western civilisation it is just an object.

SPIRITUAL ECONOMY TEACHES us to have no fear and to celebrate the Earth – that is the reason we are environmentalists. We do not want to save the Earth because of our fear of global warming but because of our love for the Earth. In spiritual economy the relationship between every living plant and creature is a part of a delicate balance; even worms are sacred for without them to condition the soil there would be no food – so we have to respect worms. Once we have this reverence for the Earth then all our economic systems will naturally be sustainable.

The endless talk about global warming is distracting us from the real issue. The world’s approach to climate change is all about treating the symptoms. Everyone, especially politicians and business leaders, is jumping onto this bandwagon. They have not learnt to love the Earth, rather they are consumed by the idea that climate change will provide them with new business opportunities for economic growth. They are enthralled by the mantra of – “economic growth, economic growth, economic growth”. I prefer my mantra which is ‘Earth I love, Earth I celebrate, Earth I enjoy’. And to enjoy the gifts of the Earth we must look after her, care for her and preserve her as a privileged member of life on Earth.

Global warming or no global warming, caring for the Earth is our prime responsibility. Economics of course has its place but must be kept in its place and not be allowed to dominate. ‘*Ecos*’ is the Greek word for home, ‘*logos*’ means knowledge, and ‘*nomos*’ means management. If we don’t know our planet home, how are we going to manage it? Therefore ecology comes first. Once we realise the subservient place of economics to ecology then global warming will go away. Global warming is caused by the dominance of economics and by globalization.

As Einstein told us, we cannot solve a problem with the same mindset that caused it in the first place.

We need to aim for something better than endless economic growth – a growth which is soulless and leads to ecological destruction. And what happens to the trillions of dollars that economic growth has created? We see it spent on war or the weapons needed for war. Money beyond a certain limit can be a burden; it can bring unhappiness, and worse, poverty and exploitation. Money is not real wealth. The Earth is the true source of our wealth. The middle way is the ideal to aim for, where there are no extremes of wealth and poverty, because as long as there are wealthy people there will be poor people. If we truly want to make poverty history, we also have to make wealth history. A state of balance, equality and equanimity is the spiritual economy. •

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