

Human Society, Spirituality and Renewal

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WE have travelled to the moon, discovered evidence of water on Mars, climbed Mount Everest and found hitherto unknown life forms at the bottom of the ocean. But there is another quest which is the ultimate human adventure. The questions which characterize this quest transcend the physical world, may confound modern science, and cannot be answered through physical measurement, sophisticated cameras or other types of modern technology. Prof. Kurt Dressler has formulated this quest as 'the fundamental human search for the origin, essence, and end of our puzzling existence in a multifaceted world'. This search may lead us into religion, philosophy or science. But at the end it is also a search into our deepest nature. One way of describing this process is a quest for Spirit, reflected more and more in our emerging spirituality.

Human Society

As one examines human society today, from one point of view it presents us a large array of institutions. Formal

definitions of society include 'a particular community'. The question naturally follows, 'What is a community?' Simply put, a community is a group of people. So when considering human society we can reduce it from the complexity of many institutions and cultural elements, to its essential building blocks — that is, the 6.8 or so billion people on the planet and what transpires between them. In fact the philosopher J. Krishnamurti described society fundamentally as relationship. He observed: 'Human beings throughout the world have tried to create a just society, outside. But society is our relationship with each other.'

In this regard, there was a timely summation of the tone of the first decade of the twenty-first century by a BBC journalist, who wrote that the biggest impact of the decade, which has set the tone and defined the era, has come from 'you'. In his view, *Time* magazine got it right in 2006 when it made 'you' Person of the Year by putting a mirror on its front cover. 'You', wrote this journalist, 'have increasingly locked horns with the

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institutions that are supposed to represent you or act in your interest. You have lost faith in . . . banks . . . , in politicians . . . and the companies that have put food on your table.’ And when you can do something about it on the Internet, he commented, you have flourished. The biggest conflict then in the past decade, he asserted, has been between you and your expectations. In other words, he sees this decade as being one of self-interest, self-expression and conflict in *relationship* — in this case, between the individual and society’s institutions. We might add, though, that self-interest seems to be more or less a perennial feature of humanity as a whole.

Relationship takes various forms. Not only do we move outwards to others in relationship but the polarity of life also determines that, in time, we must eventually move *inwards* too, through the fields of our consciousness, towards the transcendent Source of Be-ness, which Madame Blavatsky called the Ultimate Reality. Through destructive means, for millennia, humanity as a whole has lost its innocence and has now perhaps become too sophisticated for its own good. For many, though, an unfolding relationship with the spiritual helps bring a more balanced perspective to life.

Spirituality

We may now ask, ‘What is spirituality?’ The term tends to be used loosely today and often has a certain vagueness about it. In fact, it might be useful to commence by considering what spirituality is *not*,

before trying to make some sense of what it might be. The following remarks are predicated on the axiom that humans have a multilayered consciousness which goes deeper than the everyday personality, deeper than the mind, to regions of our consciousness which connect us with *Brahman*, the unfathomable Godhead.

So, let us consider what spirituality is not:

Firstly, spirituality is not synonymous with psychism. Many apparently spiritual pursuits are on offer today, promising numerous wonderful things. These may pull a person in several directions at once. But such pursuits do not satisfy our deeper yearnings. A pantheon of advertisements can be seen the world over, promising to help us become happier or perhaps develop certain psychic powers. Such powers may hold a certain glamour but belong to the realm of the everyday personality with all of its ambitions and failings. They do not take us very deep within. In fact, the failings of an individual who prematurely attains certain psychic powers are likely to become magnified in such a situation, perhaps leading to a greatly inflated sense of self-importance and delusions that the person is extraordinarily special with messages of great significance for the world. Such an individual may — or may not — be ethical. In many cases, *without* real moral preparation, the deliberate development of psychic powers may be unhelpful in the long run. It is wiser to allow such abilities to unfold naturally in the course of evolution, rather than to be

Human Society, Spirituality and Renewal

artificially hastened.

Secondly, spirituality is not something which can be brought about rapidly. It unfolds when the right conditions are present.

In the third place, spirituality cannot be bestowed upon us by another individual. Dependence of any sort leads one away from spiritual awakening.

Fourth, spirituality does not automatically follow just because one becomes learned in religious matters.

Fifth, spirituality is not something superficial.

And sixth, spirituality is not the result of self-centred pursuit of certain things. That is, it is not about 'you', to borrow *Time* magazine's term.

So, what *is* spirituality? For a start, if we consider the alternative side of the points already made, we may begin to understand its nature better:

Firstly, authentic spirituality transcends the psychic realm. It is a deep-seated, innate longing to connect consciously with the Divine. When spirituality is genuine, there is a profound conviction of the deepest sacredness within all life which expresses itself naturally in ethical living. In fact, in the book *The Nature of Nature*, Professor Klaus Klostermaier cites the well-known scientist Konrad Lorenz, who viewed the greatest danger of humankind today 'not in the nuclear threat or in the ecological crisis, but in the progressive decay and disintegration of ethics and morality' (p.379). This is a sobering thought. The ecological crisis is very real. But we need to ask ourselves,

what is at the root of all this? Ultimately humanity is lacking collectively in morality. Until there is a more widespread sense of the sanctity of life, this moral crisis will continue.

Secondly, the unfoldment of spirituality requires sustained attention; it does not manifest rapidly. During the course of human evolution worldly conditioning becomes embedded in the consciousness, like a fossil which becomes embedded in rock for long ages. However, this ultimately needs to be reversed for our full humanity to be revealed, which may be painful. Therefore it may take lifetimes for an individual to reach spiritual maturity.

Thirdly, the unfoldment of genuine spirituality is a 'do-it-yourself' enterprise and cannot be bestowed upon us by another. Certainly we may seek and receive help on this quest in many ways, perhaps through religious traditions, but ultimately no one can simply give us spirituality.

Fourth, knowledge on the one hand, and the distillation of life experience into Wisdom on the other, are quite distinct from each other. For example, an ability to simply remember various religious teachings does not necessarily make a person spiritual. But when such knowledge is accompanied by a feeling of the inwardness of life, and a genuine willingness to examine oneself, then spirituality may emerge. The ancient Greek aphorism to 'Know Thyself', inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, was a perennial message of Wisdom to humanity which

is not specific to one cultural era.

Fifth, spirituality requires thoughtful intelligence tempered with discernment. At some stage during our journey, we begin to ask *large* questions about life as surely as night follows day. We may start to question teachings which come our way, even perhaps question so-called spiritual authorities, in order to come to our own understanding of our place in the Cosmos. In the process there is a natural growth in character and inner strength.

And sixth, spirituality means the activation of our highest qualities which emerge from the inside outwards. Such qualities include humility and the noblest nuance of love. They are essentially selfless and altruistic qualities. They are not centred on the individual, but centre on the other. Spirituality is this 'other centredness'.

Meaning

We can add to these points that spirituality becomes increasingly prominent as we uncover meaning in life. For devoid of meaning, life remains ordinary and even arid. Energy is focused solely on things material and a false degree of importance may be attributed to everyday pursuits. In *The Conquest of Illusion* the author, J. J. van der Leeuw wrote:

When we realize the eternal meaning of life we can see how much there is in life that is superfluous and even harmful, we can see how much there is that can be spared and must be eliminated, but at the same time we can see how much is lacking, how much *more* we need. (p.221)

Here we may also do well to consider the teaching of the Cosmic power of *māyā*. Madame Blavatsky pointed out that *māyā* denotes all that is subject to change through decay and differentiation, all that has a beginning and an end. Therefore thoughts which come and go are *māyā*, emotions which magnify and then recede are *māyā*, and physical forms which eventually decay are *māyā*. The word originates from the root *mā*, to measure, conveying a sense of limitation or perhaps of incomplete expression.

Māyā does not mean that things which are seen do not exist. But the point of mentioning this concept is that by and large we actually have a distorted view of the world as a result of our own conditioning, which is bound by time and incomplete.

When there is a larger perspective, and life is seen as from above, then the view *completely* changes. To use an analogy, when we ascend in an aeroplane things on the earth below begin to merge together, so that there is more and more connection. The bigger picture takes shape and takes precedence over little things. A veil, or a limited view, is lifted when things become clear.

Simplicity

When the perspective of our consciousness is altered in this way, then certain things which previously seemed necessary become 'small' as they are seen in their proper place. For example, tendencies towards competition, aggression or accumulating things material may

Human Society, Spirituality and Renewal

begin to pale. There is, in effect, a *new* mode of seeing which is at once deceptively simple and profound.

The previous passage by J. J. van der Leeuw continued:

The simplicity of real life can truly manage with but a fraction of the manifold encumbrances and complexities of modern life . . . Truly we cannot arrange our lives wisely unless we know the meaning of life; we shall but continue to seek our riches where no riches are, to waste our energies where they do but harm, forgetting all the while the wisdom of Ruskin's saying: 'There is no wealth but life.'

The passage concerned suggests that 'real life', which is experienced by a more elevated consciousness, is itself informed by simplicity. This contrasts directly with the complex worldly existence of so many people. Have we therefore forgotten what simplicity is? Much energy may be wasted on things which ultimately are not so important. In a genuine spiritual life actions become more restrained. But, paradoxically, one's inner life becomes deeper and far richer. A life of 'busy-ness' becomes a life of fullness.

The Poles of Our Nature

We can also approach the subject of spirituality in a slightly different way, by considering life's fundamental polarity. The essential polarity which one meets in the Wisdom-Teachings is *Purusha-Prakṛti*, or Spirit-Matter.

We need to distinguish polarity from

duality, because if Spirit-Matter were a duality then we would be irrevocably divided from our spiritual nature. But in essence we are seamlessly integrated with Spirit. Many people do sense a fundamental connectivity with the Cosmos. We are not divided into Spirit and Matter, but are Spirit-Matter *conjoined*. The spiritual pole of our nature gradually reveals itself as we evolve, like a flower which opens.

An American author, Emily Sellon, put the question of Spirit-Matter in a slightly different way, which may be a little easier to come to terms with. She observed that every single entity has an 'inwardness' and an 'outwardness'. This is something which we can easily feel as conscious beings. Within the human being is an inner space of awareness and perception which is non-physical and non-local.

Dynamism in Polarity

Now when there is polarity then there is also interaction. There is a particular word in the Wisdom Tradition which denotes a certain dynamism which results from polarity — '*fohat*'. Said to be a Tibetan term, it has been described in various ways — for example, in terms of energy, force and dynamism. It has been described as the energizing power of the universe.

Described additionally as the essence of change from one phase of manifested existence to another, *fohat* is said to be active microcosmically and macrocosmically — in atoms, solar systems, planets, and even within *us*. But, significantly, it is also said to both energize

and bind, acting like a kind of glue, because it connects polarities. Significantly for us, it is brought to life even more with spiritual awakening and its associated inner renewal. Some refer to this as the Christ consciousness or the Buddha nature.

Renewal

So we now enter the realm of renewal. The Christian Apostle St Paul said, 'Do not let the present press you into its mould. Instead, be transformed by the renewal of your minds'. Was he suggesting to the Corinthians, to whom he spoke, not to allow themselves to be moulded by society? He alluded to that mental renewal which naturally comes into being when our conditioning is set aside. Such renewal cannot come about when the mind is full of earthly things; it takes place when we enter non-earthly stillness. When we become silent, even for a short while, spaces within the higher reaches of our minds inevitably reveal themselves. Associated with this is a loss of a sense of physical space, perhaps a kind of lightness. These inner spaces of our consciousness are uncluttered; and they have great *vitality*. Being closer to the spiritual pole of our nature, they contain an unconditioned energy which can percolate through into our everyday consciousness, helping to bring out what is best in us from latency into potency. Moments of mental silence can bring clarity and a release of energy, helping us navigate through life more easily just as lightning suddenly brightens a dark sky.

Love

The passage previously quoted from J. Krishnamurti continued: 'In that relationship there is no love, no compassion. You may have excellent laws, but those laws can be broken. So without that quality, do what you will, you will not create a marvellous world' (p.56). He observed that we may work together for an ideal if we agree on something but it 'soon begins to break up because we interpret it according to our personal likes and dislikes, prejudices'. Cooperation only comes, he commented, when there is love in our hearts. So to the extent that it is without love, without compassion, the world is a lesser place.

Love in some form or other is enjoined in the world's great religious traditions. For example, St Paul's comments on love in *The Holy Bible* are sublime. They include the following words:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am as clanking brass and tinkling cymbal. . . . if I do not have love, I am nothing.

St Paul spoke of speech which is a power, although perhaps it is not commonly thought of in that way. Words are remarkably potent and their vibrations have far greater effect than we might imagine. Many careless words are spoken because they come from a consciousness characterized by self-centredness. Devoid of a fundamental connection with all life on our part, they do not perhaps amount to much. Until universal love takes root in us and starts to grow, we are not capable

Human Society, Spirituality and Renewal

of expressing more fully our humanity.

It is probably fair to say that we generally only know a more limited version of love. We may feel a deep affection for another, but what we call love may still have a selfish tinge to it. Perhaps it is conditional on certain factors being met in order for it to be maintained.

Relationship and Society

Let us return, finally, to relationship and society. Relationship finds its highest expression when there is genuine love. One maxim which is found throughout various religious traditions presents a fundamental principle of right relationship. It is simple, yet remarkably difficult to carry out. The maxim concerned reminds us to treat others just as we would wish them to treat us and is popularly known as the Golden Rule.

Theosophical teachings point not just to the possibility, but to the *inevitability*, of humankind developing an authentic

and meaningful relationship with Spirit. Many feel such a relationship whether or not they belong to any particular religious tradition. The great saints and sages throughout history, and some inspiring individuals in this era, give testimony to the reality of humanity's ultimate nobility of Spirit. For within us there is renewal if we dare to look at ourselves intelligently, and if we dare to become quiet which many people may be afraid to do. With renewal comes energy and goodness. With renewal comes a natural ethic which cascades into our activities and relationships. In meaningful relationship there is renewal. The renewal of a critical mass of humanity, reflected in right relationship, can act as a midwife which will one day help give birth to a spiritual renaissance within human society.

One, and only one, question is now important: Is there a *deeply* felt urge for such renewal within each and every one of us? ✧

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