



# SPIRIT OF HUMANITY FORUM

*Caring for the Earth*



2017

# INTRODUCTION

In April 2016, the Brahma Kumaris hosted a Dialogue at their Retreat Centre at Nuneham Park near Oxford in the UK to consider "Caring for the Earth". This gathering was part of the work being undertaken by the Brahma Kumaris as a partner of the Spirit of Humanity Forum, and as part of the preparation for the Forum's gathering to be held in Reykjavik, Iceland in April 2017.

What follows is, first, a short report of the April 2016 event, and then a separate contribution from Sister Jayanti of the Brahma Kumaris given to the Fez Summit of Conscience held in November 2016 in connection with the UN Climate Change Conference, COP22, being held in Marrakesh, Morocco. It is included here in part because it is another contribution from the Brahma Kumaris, but especially because it makes clear that the "crisis" we face is at heart a spiritual crisis.



# Caring for the Earth

A Report of a Spirit of Humanity Dialogue held in April 2016, at the Brahma Kumaris Retreat Centre at Nuneham Park near Oxford in the UK.

Caring for the Earth requires something of us, something that is nurtured and deepened by spiritual practice and by spiritual community, both of which nourish our work of care. Whatever we do, whatever place we are in, we should ask first not what shall I do, but what does this place, what does this Earth require of me? In other words we are called not simply to action, but to service. Caring for each other and for the Earth is just that, service, deep service.

Much of the difficulty we have in undertaking this service is caused by our distorted perception of who we are. For example, we think we are essentially physical and because of this we are inclined to focus on our physical well-being. By contrast, the Brahma Kumaris teach that each one of us is a spiritual being "a minute point of luminous non-physical energy," a soul, "invisible, immortal and ultra-subtle." To acknowledge that this is so, and to nurture it, is the work of "soul consciousness." When our perceptions are shaped by soul consciousness, it is easier for us to accept that our lives should be in service to others, to The Other, and to the Earth.

And here is another example. The social biologist Humberto Maturana and his colleague Gerda Verden-Zöller propose that we are by nature loving beings. In their book, *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*,<sup>1</sup> they show that we have come from a species of ape that nurtured its children over an extended period of time, and that this experience of nurturing was carried into adult life in the practice of what we might call loving-kindness and an inclination to community.

Such perceptions change everything. For they challenge the dominant perception of our time, that is that we are naturally, selfish, competitive and greedy and that we can only live well if we consume more and more without limit. But if these other perceptions are true then "caring for the Earth" takes on a particular meaning. It is not caring for the Earth for our own selfish benefit. It is a caring that is concerned with nurturing for the common good, for the flourishing of all, of all that is. There is no "them", only "us".

1. Humberto Maturana Romesin and Gerda Verden-Zöller, *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*, Imprint Academic, 2008.

## RIGHT BEING: THE PRACTICE OF CARING

So let us suppose for the moment that this might be possible, that we might acknowledge that “right being” is being in service, and that this requires that we learn how to care; that caring becomes a necessary part of who we must be if we are to be true to ourselves, to each other and to the Earth.

Such a proposition requires that we completely re-evaluate the practice of caring, raising it from its somewhat lowly position in our present culture – where carers are the lowest paid, if they are paid at all – towards an honoured place that is rightly respected and rewarded.



## SHARED EXPERIENCES

It is this proposition that lay at the centre of this dialogue. The purpose was to bring together a small group of quite different people, philosophers, environmental activists, educators and performers, in a manner that would provide them space to share their experience and reflect upon what it might mean to care for the Earth. The manner of the gathering was important, because it goes to the root of how such questions can be heard and spoken of. The conversations and shared experiences were set within a context of silent reflection and stillness, which was not separate from but a part of the dialogue. The moments of silence and the moments of conversation were entwined.

We found that the qualities of care that we were looking for required both forms of engagement – the engagement of ideas and shared experience and the engagement that comes from a gathered silence.

There are many gatherings that seek solutions to the problems of climate change, resource depletion, the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the frailty of our economies. And it is increasingly understood that these problems are interconnected and need to be considered as a whole.

There are also many initiatives that are tackling these problems in practical ways, initiatives such as the Zero Carbon project and the work of “restorative agriculture”, both of which were described to us at Nuneham Park.



## FROM THE INNER TO THE OUTER

But perhaps the most important part of our work together lay in the manner of our proceeding. Each of our days was set within a pattern of silence and reflection. The days began and ended with meditation and were punctuated both by the regular hourly (and sometimes half-hourly) pauses, or "traffic control", which are part of the daily routine of the Brahma Kumaris, and by additional moments of silence and reflection. Not only was this silence a part of the Dialogue, it was its foundation. And, afterwards, many of the participants spoke of how important and nurturing this had been.

*"Out of reflection comes thought for action and intention to do things differently, standing back from the everyday and from too many activities..."*

*"I have learned to seek more silence and to nourish my thoughts, my intention, and my will and to grow greater love, harmony and peace. I wish to do things differently, to check my reactions and actions more rigorously and engage in greater deliberation with myself in order to act more powerfully from my heart and love and peace."*

*"It's not what we need to do and where we need to go, but first it's about asking ourselves the right questions that are true to ourselves. Always reminding us to think bigger and think differently."*

*"I have been touched by the level of humility and openness in wanting to see each other's perspectives. And the willingness to change perspectives."*

A recurring theme in our discussions, in understanding the connection between our inner state of being and outer action, was a simplicity in thinking, which reflects in simplicity in lifestyle. Simplicity of mind was considered to lead to authenticity, enabling us to find direction in the complexity of the world. Thus simplicity was seen as a key to sustainable living.

As we shift our consciousness into a more spiritual way of being, a new story is emerging for humanity. And as we engage those around us in true cross-sector, cross-cultural collaboration, new doors will be open to us, resulting in new visions and actions. We need to embrace the new technologies to help us develop and share the "New Story", and develop new solutions to mitigate against, and adapt to, climate change and other global challenges.

More than anything, we ourselves need to be an inspiring role model, having a simple and sustainable way of living and trying to help others to find their own way.

## THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT OF HUMANITY FORUM



This, then, brings us back to the special role that the Spirit of Humanity Forum has in exploring and supporting "Caring for the Earth", and the questions that arise therefrom. In this it would seem that there must be a coherence between the aim of the work and the manner in which it is carried out. The way in which we proceed in our work must be aligned to the aim of becoming caring.

At first this may seem a simple matter, but since our everyday world, the public realm, is shaped by a dominant culture of selfishness, separation and competition, it is not. For the crisis we face is a crisis of perception. The very way we see the world, or have been encouraged to see the world, determines what we see and therefore do. Our thoughts are made concrete. Our world becomes what we suppose it to be.

The clarification and transformation of perception requires the deliberate practice of silence and stillness, the practice of soul consciousness, in order that, in mind and heart, we can be cleared of the distorting habitual assumptions of our dominant culture and make way for the arising of our natural intelligence, the intelligence of wholeness, love, compassion and community. It is only when this way of seeing is firmly established and expressed within us that we can begin the work of caring for the Earth. Without this, we are too frail, and will always be taken off course, allowing ourselves to be pushed or drawn into the very manner of being that has caused the wounds that we now seek to heal.

## QUESTIONS FOR REYKJAVIK 2017

At the end of this Dialogue, the questions we have for the Reykjavik 2017 Forum are these:

1. What are the practices and ways of proceeding that will strengthen lives lived in love, compassion and service?
2. What is the role of silent reflection in this?
3. What are the institutional structures that will facilitate these ways of being?
4. How can we then move from reflection to action in ways that are coherent and whole?
5. How do we care for the Earth?

This report for the Spirit of Humanity Forum to be held in Reykjavik, Iceland in April 2017 was prepared by Sister Jayanti, Sister Maureen and David Cadman.



## DIGNITY, TRUST, RESPECT: THE FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUALITY



This is the contribution given by Sister Jayanti to Summit of Conscience held in Fez, on 3rd November 2016, in connection with the UN Climate Change Conference COP22, Marrakech, Morocco

At the heart of every tradition - traditions that belong to the one human family - lie three aspects: respect for the Sacred, the Divine; deep inner values; and thirdly, a guide or sign post for what human life is about and what we as human beings need to be doing in life. I sense that whatever our diverse views may be, we come together and share these three core understandings.

In recent decades in particular, leaders in big business and media have held sway and influenced a wide spectrum of decision makers in communities, right through to the grass roots level. But what seems to be missing in that process is the art of listening to the voice of conscience.

The present state of world affairs suggests to me that the voice of conscience has become numb, if not silenced. To illustrate this point, if we have a good friend who we don't listen to once, twice, three times, five times, the friend would say eventually, "OK do as you wish. I won't say any more." I feel this is a reflection of what's going on inside each of us. The conscience has stopped speaking to us and maybe even when it does tune in sometimes, we don't heed its signal because of public opinion, society, culture, and history. Instead, we say, "Let's just follow what others are doing and move along." I see that this is a time when enlightened people, people with an awakened conscience, come together. This trend signals

great hope because generally, it has always been only a small influential minority that has brought major about changes in history. It's never been the majority that says, "Let's go a different way." It's always been a few dedicated individuals who have awakened and understood which new steps to take.

From our conversations in Paris and now in Marrakesh, I see the start of a new phase in which a small group of people are saying it's time to listen to our conscience. So what happens when the conscience awakens? As I embark on my inner journey to listen to that quiet voice within, I honour my unique perspective, knowing that each of us has an individual worldview. I then move away from narrow perspectives and let my horizons widen. We begin to see each other as part of one human family and respect planet Earth as our home. We also look at the past and see what we have all done and then take steps not to get stuck in old habits. I look towards the future and see what I need to do now to create the future of my choice.

The choice is not a difficult one. It's not even just a question of a better world. Right now, it's actually a question of survival. This is why it's such an important time now, in which we gather together to talk about these concerns and needs. Yes, words and actions are sacred, but the seed of change sits within the human heart and the human mind. Compassion awakens within the alert conscience; we begin to treat each other with dignity and respect. But where do respect and dignity come from? They don't begin in my interaction with you; they begin deep down within the core of



my inner being. In sweet silence, I can hear not only my voice of conscience but I also connect with the truth, the love, the purity and peace that lie within the human itself, the spirit, the being. When I tap into these inner qualities I then learn to respect myself.

Many of our conversations have considered people's loss of self-esteem, and I believe societies worldwide are facing a huge crisis of identity and values, on top of the environmental crisis. And, as we have shared often, respect begins when I go inside and revisit my own inner qualities and universal values. There can be no debate or question about what those qualities are; we would all agree on those. When we go into silence and connect with those qualities within the self, then we're able to start respecting the self and respecting each other. Then naturally, that respect extends to all forms of life, to nature itself and this planet that we share. In this state of sharing, we also benefit personally because, through silence and an active conscience, we can transform our inner being and the things we do.

There are **five** simple and practical principles that our Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative is based on.

- Simplicity:** Are there ways in which I can simplify my lifestyle?
- Compassion:** Can I make choices about buying compassionately?
- Economy:** Can I use and reuse and what I have economically?
- Lifelong learning:** Can I open my mind to learn continuously for a lifetime?
- Generosity:** Am I able to share generously?

At the moment, the Brahma Kumaris are one of the largest single organisational users of solar energy in India. We also are active in reforestation projects across India.

To close, I would like us to take a moment of silence to connect with that being within and the deep peace that resides within the self:

I go on an inner journey and come to that point of awareness of the sacred space within; the being that I am.

Aware of the inner being, I link with my original qualities of peace... of love... of truth... purity... and joy, and in this connection with myself, I resolve to keep these qualities as a guiding force in my words and in my actions.

Read more at: [www.eco.brahmakumaris.org](http://www.eco.brahmakumaris.org)



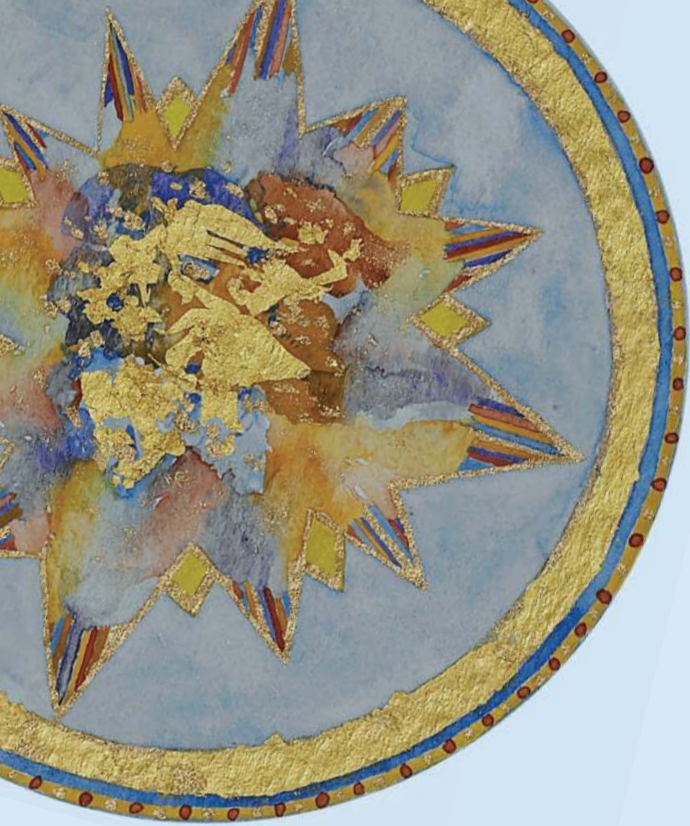


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