



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Consciousness and Climate: Confluence of Two Living Systems II

Statement for the 16th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

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Context

As a nongovernmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations (UN), the contribution of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) to the UN community is in considering issues, such as climate change, in a spiritual framework, highlighting the inner dimension of the decisions facing the UN member states.

Our premise in the first in this series of papers (Dec. 2009) was that what the world needs at this time is a profound shift in awareness – a shift in the thinking that is producing our current crisis. Expanding the Climate Change conversation to include the inner dimension, will transform the quality of the conversation and the possible agenda for action among stakeholders. We proposed that the UN, with its unparalleled convening power, could elevate the climate change agenda in this way.

The Confluence of Two Living Systems

The crucial challenges facing the Earth at this time are best understood when we see the Earth as a living system. Living Systems Theory is a body of work that describes how all living systems function, how they sustain themselves, and how they develop and change. “Living systems” is a metaphor that represents an animate arrangement of parts and processes that continually affect one another over time self organizing, growing, changing, and connecting. When we are able to see the intricate interconnections of the many parts of the living system, our view of the world begins to change.

Human thought is also a system, a flow of impressions, memories, habits, thoughts and feelings, affecting everything they touch. This assertion was advanced eloquently by physicist David Bohm in a 1990 seminar in Ojai, California and was later published in a book called *Thought as a System* (Routledge, 1994). He believed that the breakdowns in the living system of the Earth were attributable to our lack of understanding of the systemic nature of thought. For one thing, he asserted, thought naturally fragments things:

“One of the obvious things wrong with thought is fragmentation. Thought is breaking things up into bits, which should not be broken up. ...Thought fragments knowledge and so our system of thought allows us to separate causes from effects, to miss the interconnections between what is happening upstream and the effect of that action downstream.” (pp 2-3, Bohm).

Another problem with thought, Bohm explained, is that thought is participatory – it affects the world, all the while claiming that it is only commenting on the world.

Bohm: “Thought is always doing a great deal, but it tends to say that it hasn’t done anything, that it is just telling you the way things are – that ‘you’ are inside there, deciding what to do with the information...but you don’t decide what to do with the information. The information takes over and runs you.”(p. 5, Bohm).

The implications of the role of human thinking in creating and perpetuating the tragic degradation of the Earth cannot be overstated. Without a profound epiphany or awakening we are never able to see ourselves as separate from the kind of thinking that we do. We believe we are simply perceiving things the way they really are, when in fact our limited thinking is causing us to see a fragmented world, for example, to see the Earth as a storehouse of resources to be mined for the World’s consumers.

What can we do to intervene in the vicious cycle of increasing fragmentation and blindness? What will allow us to dismantle the artificial boundaries we have constructed (in our minds and in the world) and to see the unified system of which we are a part?

A Change in Awareness

The inner world of thought and the outer world of physical phenomena are actually not separate worlds or systems. They are part of the same “causal continuum.” Outer physical phenomena begin as inner subtle phenomena – impressions, thoughts and feelings. Experiences, impressions and thoughts can change even a long held awareness. For example the astronauts and cosmonauts would have believed they were part of a large, solid, and stable earth until the moment when they found themselves in space looking out the window of a spaceship and seeing the lovely Earth spinning slowly in the vast ocean of space like a small blue marble. After that experience, many of them spoke of Earth’s vulnerability and of “Spaceship Earth.”

In this causal continuum, our awareness naturally produces a certain kind of attitude. Our thoughts and feelings emerge naturally from the attitude we hold. Our attitude also causes us to see things in a certain way. Because we see things in this way, we take a certain kind of action, in turn creating a certain kind of world. This is Bohm’s point about how our system of thought misleads us: we think we are simply perceiving things as they are, but actually we are perceiving things as they are constructed in our minds based on our attitude, formed invisibly, silently by our inner awareness.

So if we want to change the world we are continuously recreating, we need to go “upstream” of laws, treaties, and policies designed to police actions, because with those actions we are working at the end of the causal continuum. We need to consider how we can work at the beginning of the continuum to change awareness, and subsequently action, on a massive scale.

The Call of Our Time: To Engage in a New Creation

The multiple indications of global crisis and break down are generating a sense of urgency worldwide. The “Green Movement” has swept the world embroiling nations in arguments about short-term economic viability versus long-term ecological sustainability. While there is merit in this discussion, it is a distraction from the more important conversation to understand what the prime mover is in this global crisis.

At this time virtually everyone understands that there is something enormous in motion that is threatening to destroy our way of life. What we need to understand is that there is also something enormous underway that is creative. It is generating a

new way of life, a new era on the Earth. This movement from the devolution of a fragile old condition to a stable new one makes sense in the context of a cyclical understanding of the natural and the underlying energetic worlds. This time is the confluence of an old and a new era.

The Brahma Kumaris understand this time to be unique. It is a time of transition on a scale unparalleled in the history of time, a movement of the world from an old age to a new age, a new beginning, a renewed creation – a time when the Divine Energy is active in the world and engaged in creation. As in all transitional times, there are two things going on simultaneously: there is a part of the world that is falling away and dying and another part that is emerging as new growth.

What is possible at this time is to understand, experience, and support this emergent world, beginning with a shift in awareness.

An Opportunity for the UN

Unique to the UN is the opportunity to convene a global conversation, to set the parameters of the conversation, to raise the fundamental questions and to invite those to the table who offer new distinctions. In addition to the marathon conversations on the exchange of carbon units and management of forests, the UN would do well to create space for a conversation with a different focus – a conversation that considers the emergent world and the opportunities it might hold for the global family. To tap into the inner dimension of a new creative era such a conversation might include periods for silent reflection and might involve those with expertise in the inner dimensions as well as those with expertise in the material worlds of science and governance. It might eschew speech making in favour of shared discovery, reflective listening, and sense making.

This courageous act by the UN might shift the direction of the global public discourse and bring important perspectives from the margins to the centre of public consideration. It would be an act of true and original leadership and may lead to shifts in awareness, which could open the door for sunrise technologies, new economic models and a higher bar on integrity in caring for the global commons.

An offer from the Brahma Kumaris

Since 1998 the Brahma Kumaris have been supporting a dialogue among global leaders on “The Call of the Time.” The Call-of-the-Time Dialogues convene leaders on the field of world service around the question, “What is the call of this time?” Over a period of three and a half days, a group of about thirty moves between reflection, small group conversation and conversations of the whole exploring the subtle inner shifts in awareness that are necessary to respond to the call of this time. We focus on the cultivation of practice to sustain the elements of awareness that are necessary for this time.

Over the past eleven years we have held roughly thirty dialogues and related retreats, published two journals and one imprint for the State of the World Forum in 2000 all exploring the dynamics between inner awareness and outer action. Hundreds of thought leaders from science, business, media, politics, and academia from all continents have participated – many returning year after year for rejuvenation and a space from which to consider vexing problems with fresh eyes. MIT lecturer and co-facilitator of the annual international Call-of-the-Time dialogue in Oxford, England, Peter Senge, wrote an article proposing that the quality of treaties such

as the Kyoto Protocol would be vastly improved if the meetings in which they are created are preceded by a dialogue, such as the Call-of- the-Time dialogue.

The Brahma Kumaris are happy to extend an offer to the UN to collaborate on the creation of a dialogue, or a series of dialogues, to explore the deeper dimensions of the global climate change issue. We might begin by inviting a few leaders from the UN community to attend the annual international dialogue in Oxford and then use this core group to develop a dialogue focused on global climate change.

Our hope is that by combining the convening power of the UN with the Brahma Kumaris expertise in designing and holding these dialogues, we might accelerate the shifts in awareness that are crucial to the global climate change conversation – that are in fact the call of this time.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The BKWSU is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in consultative status with UNICEF. The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 108 countries worldwide. It has been affiliated to the United Nations Department of Public Information since 1980.

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