



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Consciousness and Climate: Confluence of Two Living Systems

Statement for the

United Nations Climate Change Conference

December 7-18, 2009, Copenhagen, Denmark

Context

As a nongovernmental organization with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) contributes to the UN community by reframing issues, such as climate change, and in spiritual terms, by highlighting the inner dimension of the decisions facing the UN member states.

Our premise in this paper is that for the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen to have real impact, it cannot confine itself to discussions about emissions and compliance with standards. What is needed at this time is a profound shift in awareness – a shift in the thinking that is producing our current crisis. Shifting the conversation to include the inner dimension will transform the quality of the conversation and the possible agenda for action among stakeholders.

The Earth as a Living System

Any real understanding of the issue of global climate change needs to be placed in the context of 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. By definition, living systems are self-organizing. They grow. They change. They connect. They are cyclic. They are whole and systemic.

To see living systems and to understand how they work, we have to observe the connections that make up the whole system. When we are able to see the interconnections and understand how they are intricately related, then our view of the world begins to change.

Human Thought as a System

To embrace the full scope of the global climate change crisis, it is necessary to look at another system that is influencing the living system of the Earth: the system of thought at every level of human affairs, which affects our collective efforts to create a tolerable world and civilization.

In a 1990 seminar in Ojai, California, theoretical physicist David Bohm explained the system of thought that underlies the current crisis. Acknowledging the difficult situation the world is in – ecologically, economically, and so on -- he said: “People have been dealing with this piecemeal – looking at symptoms, saying that we’ve got to solve this problem or that problem or that problem. But there is something deeper, which people haven’t been considering, that is constantly generating these problems. We can use the analogy of a stream, where people are pouring pollution upstream at the same time they are trying to remove it downstream. But as

they remove it, they may be adding more pollution of a different kind. What is the source of all this trouble? The source is basically in thought” (p 2, Bohm).

“... one of the obvious things wrong with thought is *fragmentation*. Thought is breaking things up into bits which should not be broken up” (pp. 2-3, Bohm). Thought, Bohm explains, establishes boundaries to separate nations, religions, and professional groups. 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.

Bohm goes on to explain another problem with thought – that thought is participatory – that it affects the world, all the while claiming that it is only commenting on the world: “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. But thought affects everything. Even the South Pole has been affected because of the destruction of the ozone layer, which is basically due to thought. People thought that they wanted to have refrigerant – a nice safe refrigerant – and they built that all up by thinking more and more about it. And now we have the ozone layer being destroyed” (p. 5, Bohm).

Bohm argues passionately that thought has produced tremendous outward effects, and perhaps more important, tremendous inward effects in each of us. “The general tacit assumption in thought is that it’s just telling you the way things are and that it is not doing anything – 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 deteriorating conditions of the natural world are the result of a failure to see relationships between the various parts and processes of the living system. Our inability to see these relationships is the result of fragmentation in our inner system of thought. 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 and to see the unified system of which we are a part and for which we are the trustees?

A Change in Awareness: Seeing with Systemic Vision

The key to intervening in the unfolding events of the outer biological system is to create a change in the inner system of thoughts. First, we must make thought aware of its role in creating the world – or to put it another way – we must make the thinkers of thoughts aware that we are not neutral observers of a sequence of events: our inner beliefs affect our process of observing and the choices we make as a result, affecting the very world we are observing.

Second, we must have an epiphany, an experience that breaks through our inner system of thought with a new and paradigm-shattering awareness. It is experience that changes our awareness. We need an epiphany on a global scale. To change our inner system of thinking, we need a collective “aha” moment on the scale of those of the astronauts and cosmonauts who saw Earth from space for the first time:

They say if you have experiments to run, stay away from the window. For me, preoccupied with the Drop Dynamics Module, it wasn’t until the last day of our flight that I even had a chance to look out. But when I did, I was truly overwhelmed.

A Chinese tale tells of some men sent to harm a young girl who, upon seeing her beauty, become her protectors rather than her violators. That's how I felt seeing the Earth for the first time. I could not help but love and cherish her (p. 60, Kelley).

– Taylor Wang, China/ USA

From space I saw Earth – indescribably beautiful with the scars of national boundaries gone (p. 77, Kelley).

– Muhannad Ahmad Faris, Syria

After an orange cloud – formed as a result of a dust storm over the Sahara and caught up by air currents – reached the Philippines and settled there with rain, I understood that we are all sailing in the same boat (p 77, Kelley).

– Vladimir Kovalyonok, USSR

Astronauts and cosmonauts are members in an exclusive club – those who have witnessed the Earth from a platform in space. This experience inspired them all. And this is the kind of experience we need – a collective change in consciousness that stirs our hearts, causing us to examine the inner system of thought running inside of us. This change of awareness won't happen by citing statistics to one another. It will happen when we are deeply moved and become aware of what we need to conserve.

Cultivating Systemic Vision: A Vision of Love

When we look with a vision of love, our vision expands. Chilean cognitive biologist and systems theorist Humberto Maturana defines love as the domain of relationship when the other arises in front of us as a legitimate other. Maturana said, “Systemic seeing occurs only when you are seeing with love. The systemic seeing of love occurs only when there are no interfering emotions that make your purposes or desires guide what you do. As love becomes the unconscious guide of your doings, you see the systemic relational-operational matrix of which you are a part and in which you are immersed. You immediately know how to move in it. Seeing with love is not seeing with goodness, or kindness, or goodwill, or generosity – it is just systemic seeing” (p. 64, Rodgers and Naraine).

Maturana says that when we see with love, seeing the other (in this case the Earth and the human family) as legitimate, our vision expands and we see the whole delicate system. However, when we see from a place of self-interest, we are blinded by our own desires. We lose our systemic vision and see with a limited linear vision: “Persistent linear thinking through any conviction, whether it is religious, philosophical, political, or scientific, whether it comes from a desire to advance high ideals or private gain, negates love. And when our thinking negates love, it negates systemic vision” (p 98, Rodgers and Naraine).

The Opportunity for the UN Climate Change Initiative

The UN is rare in its ability to convene the world's member nations on behalf of the interests of the whole of the world. The urgency of the Climate Change initiative requires our most profound vision and most unselfish action agenda. The shapers of policy in most cases are enmeshed in a paradigm of development and wealth. We believe that this conference, and successive conferences on this crucial issue, must intervene in the numbing cycle of citing statistics on carbon emissions and mediating among the special interests of nation states.

We believe the UN must elevate its mandate to convening member states and inspire them to create a new level of global awareness. Anything less is a squandering of the UN's unique convening power. Anything less is a lost opportunity. The world's decision makers don't need to be scolded or cajoled, they need to be awakened to the beauty of the Earth as a delicate living system and inspired to take on the elevated task of being the Earth's trustees.

Dadi Janki, Chief of the Brahma Kumaris, understands the role of inspiration in helping us find the courage and strength to do what we need to do:

When your intent is pure, it has a vibrant impact on others. When you are touched by a good quality – inspired by a virtue or value – and act in an elevated way, your action has the potential to inspire others. It is a natural law that souls respond to the quality of intention they experience in others. When we speak about inspiration, this is what we are speaking about. Many things cannot be done without inspiration. If you have inspiration, you find the courage and strength you need, and nothing can stop you (p.79, Rodgers and Naraine).

– Dadi Janki

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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 100 countries worldwide.

It has been affiliated to the United Nations Department of Public Information since 1980.

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