



Spirituality and Ecology

Keynote speech by Sister Jayanti at
Spirituality in a Fragmented World,
Second International Conference
of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality,
1st–17th May 2012

I am pleased that an organisation such as this *Association for the Study of Spirituality* exists – especially in Britain. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some thoughts with you. There are so many different opinions and ideas as to what spirituality is. Perhaps we can look at it in a simple way:

1. From my school days I recall hearing the term IQ. This deals with the things of time and space, here in this physical dimension
2. For some decades we have been aware of another dimension – emotional intelligence. This deals with the subject of our interactions with others. If my EQ isn't of sufficient capability, my IQ can be high, but somehow things don't seem to work out in the projects I undertake at work and at home, in particular, my family life doesn't seem to be satisfactory.
3. In recent times, maybe for about 15 years or so, we have started using the expression SQ – 'spiritual intelligence'. I understand this to be the connected to my exploration of the inner being – getting to know myself and how things happen inside me.

From IQ to EQ to SQ – and then time spent with myself. From this inner space of awareness I connect with the treasures within. When I search for peace, love, truth, happiness and power outside I am led down innumerable external tracks and get lost in a maze. The reality of SQ is that I discover those treasures within.

A natural development of this is that when I begin to understand my own inner world, I begin to see a connection with those around me – and realise that there is a natural bond that holds us together. Having come to this awareness of the interconnectedness with human beings, I look outside further and see that not only are we one human family, we also belong to the same home, we share one home together – the planet.

When astronauts first saw planet Earth from outer space, they described it as a blue pearl held in the expanse of the darkness of space. So far, we haven't been able to find another planet that has water - hence the preciousness of this blue pearl that is able to support life. The first photos published by NASA also showed this beautiful planet without any boundaries. The boundaries that exist now, which have fragmented our world, have come as a result of the disconnect between ourselves and our inner self, and then with the human family around us – and so the division of the world. Not only between people, we have tried to put up boundaries on land and even on the water and in the skies!

I would now like to look at this word 'ecology'. The word comes from the Greek word 'oikos' (home).

- The first home we have in our mind, which generates our thoughts and feelings.
- The second we have is this physical body – the temple of the spirit
- The third we have is the home where family interaction takes place
- The fourth we have is the Earth – the stage for our human family play
- The fifth is the universe – our bigger home, where the planet is located

A profound and lasting balance of all these homes starts with the transformation of our consciousness and so a change in our attitudes. It is only the human species that is unable to look after its own home. Every other species takes care of its own 'nest' and makes sure that it is kept clean.

Religion (as distinct from spirituality) seems to have placed at least two contradicting strands in our attitude to these homes. On the one hand, for the Abrahamic religions, human beings are ‘trustees’, stewards of the Earth and all that live on it, and have the responsibility of caring for all. The other idea contends that human beings have been given ‘dominion’ over the Earth and so, as its lords and masters, are free to exploit it. Eastern traditions (with the concept of many lives) have taken a longer term view, as have the ancient traditions of each continent – that the Earth itself and all living creatures are sacred and have to be revered.

Spirituality has an important concept that can perhaps help us deal with the current fragmentation. On an external level, the fragmentation constantly increases. However much we try, the disintegration and chaos around us and inside us seem to accelerate. Spirituality would say that the problems actually begin inside. So, however much we may try, working to limit the damage or reverse the damage may not actually bring results, if we continue to try externally. Transformation to order from chaos, to cohesion and connectedness from fragmentation, will only begin to take place when we start ‘inside’ and first transform our character defects.

Returning to that inner sacred space of the being within means that I connect with the treasures I carry inside myself. I can then cultivate contentment, so that I may simplify my needs and not simply be a consumer who is constantly increasing consumption. I have seen the change in India from its condition of the ‘60s to how it is today, now that it is very much a ‘consumer society’. On one level it sounds as if it is development. However, the level of poverty hasn’t been reduced; if anything it has increased. The standard of living for a small percentage is now equal to those of the highest in the Western world but conditions for the millions are still below the poverty line. In effect, the wealth distribution is inequitable.

In terms of the global situation, losing the connection with the self and identifying only with the external form – this body made of matter – has bred a materialistic attitude, which has created the conditions we see today. In a materialistic world, nature, the planet and everything within that are simply things to exploit and plunder. Trees are not seen as the lungs of the planet but as timber that produces material wealth for a few.

The *Brahma Kumaris* have been active on the external level – we must have planted millions and millions of trees worldwide. In India we are the single largest users of solar energy and we began around 20 years ago to use solar energy for cooking 60,000 meals a day at our main campus in Rajasthan. *India One* is the first project of its kind to be able to store solar energy converted into electricity. People at this seminar who know the technical matters will be aware of the research and development involved in this.

The *Brahma Kumaris* are also developing ‘yogic farming’ methods using good vibrations for farming. This is being researched by a university in Gujarat and not only uses all the parameters as for organic farming but also the practice of meditation by farmers and their families. The vitamin C content of tomatoes and the protein content of wheat, etc have been measured and shown to have increased, the resistance to pests has improved and the plants are healthier.

So, all of these things are happening and are very, very important. However, the essential premise of spirituality is that there needs to be a change of consciousness and a change of heart and attitude for us to be able to contribute in a meaningful way to the state of the environment.

The *Brahma Kumaris* hold general consultative status with ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. This means that we are invited to share the spiritual perspective on all the critical issues of our times. I have been attending UN conferences since the 1980s, in particular the conferences leading up to the Rio Summit in 1992 and then the Climate Change conferences since 2009 – Copenhagen, Cancun, Durban and now Doha.

At the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban in 2011, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that he was dedicating his second term of office to the subject of the environment and climate change, since he felt that this arena is the most important issue of our times. Having spent the previous year travelling around the trouble spots of the world, he shared many stories and here are just two of them. On a South Pacific Island he met a seven year old who told him he couldn’t sleep at night, because he had nightmares of the sea coming in and sweeping away his family and his home. The other story was how in Alaska, where previously there had been no water only ice, there was now no more ice; ships could now sail this channel, whereas before they hadn’t had access even in summer—a clear indication of the global situation.

Again in Durban last year, I heard how New York City consumes the same amount of electricity as 42 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The question is: how long is it possible for this state of inequity and greed to continue? Surely, there has to be some kind of transformation, and transformation begins with ourselves.

During the Millennium Peace Summit in the year 2000, the Assistant Secretary-Generals and the Under Secretary-Generals of the UN who head up all the different UN departments – International Labour, Environment, Population, Children At Risk, Disarmament – all spoke about how there were now more resources available in terms of people, technology, information and money and yet the problems had actually got worse since the time the UN was founded. That year, Dadi Janki led the *Brahma Kumaris* delegation and I had accompanied her.

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 began as inner subtle phenomena – impressions, thoughts, feelings. Experiential thoughts and impressions can change even a long held awareness.

Physicist David Bohm believes that the breakdowns in the living system of the Earth are attributable to our lack of understanding of the systemic nature of thought:

“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.”
—David Bohm, 1990 seminar in Ojai, California, later published in the book *Thought as a System*.

This position coincides very much with the approach of the *Brahma Kumaris*. In our statement for COP16, the UN Conference on Climate Change in Cancun, we wrote:

“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.”

—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), Cancun, Mexico, 2010*

It is this fragmented state of the world that has also led to the breakdown of our home life and it is only with the power of spirituality that society and the environment can be repaired and renewed.

The divide between our conscience and our actions, our core values and the things that we are actually doing in our life, the divide between our emotions and our region, has led to the fragmentation that we see in the world. It is only when we spend time in silence and connect with the *being* – the spirit – inside, that healing can begin to take place within the self. The fragmentation then finishes and we reach a state of being whole again. When we attain this state of wholeness or even on the journey to be able to attain that, we begin to start creating wholeness in the world around us, so that we are able to rise above the current fragmentation.

Only when we turn inwards and allow our own inner core values to emerge within ourselves and be expressed in our activity are we then able to do constructive things for the world.

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative

Living in Harmony 

<http://environment.brahmakumaris.org>