



Strengthening Personal Resilience and Responsibility

Sustainable Transition Demands a New Mindset

Tuesday 16th June 2015, Aloft Hotel, Brussels

part of EU Sustainability Week

Presentation by Maureen Goodman

Programme Director, Brahma Kumaris, UK

Changing mindsets has always been difficult throughout the ages, whether it is attitudes towards women, technology, GM foods, the need to go to war. When whole swathes of populations think in a particular way, it takes a tremendous amount of effort to persuade them otherwise. In terms of the environment and the threats we are now facing - of which there is ample scientific evidence - it is no less difficult to make both governments and consumers take this seriously. We just went through one of the most vociferous election campaigns ever in Britain and yet there was literally no mention of environmental issues. Yet this is truly the greatest crisis facing us. In general there is the mindset that climate change belongs to a distant shore or that it will be all right in a little while. Consequently, governments everywhere are still seeking short term solutions.

Why is this? It is because changing a mindset demands personal change and generates a fear of the unknown. There are always those who embrace change and those who run away from change. For this change of mindset to happen, it is not enough to say that it needs to happen, but it is essential to provide visible, viable alternatives. These alternatives have to be very strong in the face of the many vested interests that work against positive change.

We have heard about the cutting edge technology that the Brahma Kumaris are developing in Mt Abu India in the form of the building of a 1 MW solar thermal power plant (India One). It is showing a viable alternative that can benefit everyone in the community and in the world. It takes a change of mindset to say, 'we do not have to do the same as we have always done'. It takes courage and vision, but it then becomes visible for all to see. Another such example is that of Interface carpets in the USA. In 1994 the founder and chairman, Ray Anderson challenged the 21 year old company to adopt a bold vision that required new thinking and a new model for business. He had not been interested in environmental issues until he read a book by Paul Hawken: The

Ecology of Commerce. One particular chapter touched him very much; it was entitled 'The Death of Birth'.

Interface focused on using the least amount of materials necessary while achieving maximum performance and switching from virgin to recycled raw materials. Worldwide, four out of seven factories operate with 100% renewable electricity and in 2014 its European manufacturing facility in The Netherlands reached the milestone of operating with 100% renewable energy, using virtually zero water in manufacturing processes and has attained zero waste to landfill. You can look up this remarkable story, which started with a huge change of mindset of the chairman of the company that affected all those who he worked with and further afield. Ray Anderson has since passed on but I had heard him speak at a conference some years ago and I was really touched by his vision and his humility. Interface make high quality carpets that people want to buy; it has made the business flourish. Sustainable transitions are possible by showing examples that bring huge benefits to the self and society.

Changing one's mindset is not only about a change of mind, it is even more about a change of heart and the heart is connected to the conscience. When something touches our heart and our conscience, as happened with these great pioneers in climate change, there is a huge motivation for change. A change of mindset becomes easy. It is like waking up with new eyes to see the world differently. These pioneers did not listen to the prevailing opinions of society, they had an inner strength that enabled them to hold on to their vision and realise it and take others with them.

The Brahma Kumaris are partners in the 'Spirit of Humanity Forum' which takes place in Iceland every two years. The forum is a space for dialogue about the capacity for the human spirit to effect change and in particular how a change in consciousness in the individual can effect systemic change. It looks at the foundation of our decision making, at what inspires our values and how we can bring greater love and compassion in governance. The Icelandic people are very resilient. They are of course lucky to be a small population living on a land where there are no power stations as all their needs for heat and power come from the Earth. Following the financial crash, people had fewer resources and so had to adopt a simpler way of living with less consumption. Research was carried out at that time which showed that family life had improved as parents were spending more time at home with their children. So a simpler, less consumerist lifestyle has many benefits.

Experts now tell us that we are beyond reversing climate change and that we need to develop strategies to cope with the sustainable transitions that are to come. People are at the heart of climate change. Each of us has a part to play in developing the resilience needed for ourselves

and our communities. Resilience is about inner strength, it is about not being suppressed by changing circumstances, but by being able to 'bounce back'; in other words being able to keep optimism and positivity in the face of challenge. Inner strength can only be developed one person at a time, but it is also a wave that can spread. Inner strength comes when, I, as an individual am able to recognise my own uniqueness beyond the opinions and influences of others and society. Inner strength comes from accessing the core of strength within which takes the form of inner calm or inner peace. Those who have a reflective or meditative practice know this state of being well. It becomes an oasis that I go to which is also a wellspring of inspiration. It provides courage and hope and it is often a healing process to know that there is a core of goodness inside of me that is unchangeable and stable. Whether or not you believe that this inner strength and inner peace comes from a Divine source, it certainly has something of the extraordinary about it. This becomes my springboard for action.

The Brahma Kumaris would like to advocate more reflection in our dialogue on climate change. More reflection on the long term effects of what we are doing and the decisions we are making; reflection on the possibilities for change, on what it means to think differently, outside of the conditioning that we have been brought up with because we are told that this is the way the world has to be. Because more of the same will lead to more of the same. We need more reflection in our lives, the ability to take pauses and so take decisions from the 'inside out' rather than the 'outside in'. And to reflect on what it means to act in a way that can create a better tomorrow for all of us.

www.eco.brahmakumaris.org