



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Consciousness and Climate Change: The Heart of an Ethical Framework

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The World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) established by the United Nations Education and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) has recently authored an Ethical Framework for Climate Change, which positions the human-nature relationship at its core. We know from past deliberations that any ethical framework must respect cultural values, be relevant to all, and act as a clear guide to all participants. This can be challenging, particularly when ethical constructs such as Universal Values, Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and the Precautionary Principle have slowed negotiations in the past.

Indigenous cultures have long understood the delicate balance between human life and natural systems, which is now in a state of marked disharmony. Recently, discussions of this intricate relationship have been finding their way into the political arena demonstrating the need for a revised ethical framework that addresses the relationship between humanity and the natural world.

To create a functional and inclusive framework, we recommend focusing on 'conditions' or 'states of being', which run deeper than values and principles. This requires a reframe of how we approach ethics with regard to climate change. We suggest that beneath values and principles lies a deeper layer, which we call 'spirituality'. In this paper, we discuss what this spirituality looks like in a broad and non-religious sense. We also outline the spiritual technology that might inform this new approach to an ethical framework for climate change.

The Human Environment Disconnect - the Seed of Climate Change

Climate Change is a complex phenomenon impacted by social development over time. The dangers of climate change are bundled with the very structures of our societies. These structures are formed by the attitudes of us - the people who are part of these societies. Somehow though, we still behave as if climate change is something that impacts us, but is independent of our behaviors.

This attitude of separation did not happen by itself, but is the result of a systematic change in our awareness of the world around us. Predominantly, the change has been from an awareness that valued and understood beauty, complexity, integrity and resilience to an attitude that has become focused on growth, profit, technology and industry. This shift has caused a near complete disconnect that has pushed the world so out of balance, that every structure that supports the common-wealth, every system that can provide a content and fruitful existence for all, is in collapse.

Each one of us bears some responsibility for this collapse. Our habit in the past has been to assign blame elsewhere, which has become a way to free ourselves from having to change. However, creating a robust ethical framework asks each of us to consider the way in which we live and how we are in the world. In other words, asking ourselves how we travel, eat, breathe, produce and consume, while considering our deeper attitudes that inform of all these behaviors. We also need to accept responsibility and stop creating artificial boundaries of accountability.

False Boundaries

We create boundaries in order to define rules, regulations, systems and customs, and laws that support social protocols. These divisions help us to determine responsibility and accountability, and this has been our approach to climate change. However, in terms of nature, all of us exist in this world as a moveable population free of boundaries and borders. Birds, fish, air, ecosystems, people, even our bodies, do not have distinct boundaries. Our skin is protective yet porous, we breathe the same air as each other.

Spirituality also has mutable boundaries. Spirituality in the true sense of the word is living sentient energy; life, breath and vigor. By definition these things are indistinct and without defined borders, yet none of us can deny their presence. They are the very foundation of existence. Spirituality by its nature is integrative. So it makes sense that any ethical framework we design in support of the environment and its inhabitants, should have similar characteristics.

Challenges to an Ethical Framework

There are a variety of challenges to creating an ethical framework. We look at the idealistic yet problematic concept of universal values and offer an alternative based on spirituality.

Historically, we have considered universal values to be the cornerstone of any robust ethical framework. However, universal values can bring cultural diversity into dispute and challenge acceptance of cultural difference. An ethical framework must be situated within something deeper and broader than the idea of universal values.

Spirituality seeks to find a common language based on *conditions* and *states of being*. Spirituality asks all people to consider the foundation of their lives and the way in which they exist in the world. Spirituality enables us to create a language around being as well as doing. Spirituality is interested in what lies beneath cultural expression, at the level of awareness, intention and attitude. Importantly, the concept of spirituality acknowledges that there are certain conditions and states of being commonly valued by the vast majority of people that may be expressed through culture, but that are deeper than culture.

Conditions and States of Being

Nature has certain inherent conditions: beauty, complexity, integrity (in this sense integrity means the state of being complete, sound and whole) and resilience. These four conditions have been cited over the decades by philosophers and religious leaders, artists and poets, physicists and natural scientists as being core existential constructs that bind people and nature together in harmony. Now perhaps it is time for these conditions - that have broad relevance and value - to be acknowledged in the political arena. We suggest that these four conditions can become a point of common understanding, from which a more rigorous ethical discussion can spring.

Beauty. Complexity. Integrity. Resilience. None of these is simplistic or claimed by any culture; each is composite and sophisticated, adding value to all life and to all life forms. They are also interrelated and the boundaries between each, undefined. Together, these form a state of simple purity unfettered by intrusion and manipulation, enabling each system to flourish in harmony

with other systems. Each one of these four conditions can be applied to the physical world of the natural environment and also to the inner world of the human spirit.

Natural Environment: A lake is beautiful. But in isolation, a lake will become fetid and dry. However, when a lake is filled with aquamarine life that is complex and varied, it becomes an integrated self-supporting eco-system. The integrity of the system makes it resilient to changes, enhancing its ability to adapt. Surrounded by trees - another distinct ecosystem - the lakes foundation is strengthened by their root system and its water shaded from the drying effects of the sun. The lake then sustains land-life and birdlife creating a symbiotic relationship with other ecosystems.

Human Spirit: Take the example of an actor. What we usually enjoy is the *complexity* of the character. The depth and range of the performance leaves us feeling satisfied and enriched. The actor's skill and complexity appears effortless and simple. Like a dancer leaving us feeling that we too can fly. The complexity of the actor's performance enhances the *integrity*, the fullness of the play. If the character was one-dimensional, had no nuance, no depth, no engagement with other characters or the plot, we would rapidly lose interest. The character would have no strength, no 'body', no *resilience*. It would no longer captivate us. The overall *beauty* of the play would quickly diminish.

Using the analogy of the actor, we can still disagree with each other about the values demonstrated by the character. But, underneath different interpretations of values, lies a common appreciation of the beauty, complexity, integrity and resilience of the character and so the play. These four states are also the foundation of wellness in nature. It becomes easier to uphold these states when we understand the spiritual trajectory and apply a simple spiritual technology.

Spiritual Trajectory

There is a spiritual trajectory everyone follows in their daily lives. Each of us holds a certain awareness about how the world is and how we are within it. For instance, we may feel the world is harmonious or fragmented, collective or individualistic, we may feel connected or disconnected. Whatever our awareness is, forms the foundation of our attitude towards other people, other life forms, and to the non-living world as well. Our attitude then shapes the way in which we see the world. If I see myself as part of a greater whole, I will use things with appreciation, gratitude and reverence. If I see myself as an isolated individual considering only what I need, then I will use things, people and animals as commodities without regard for consequence. This spirituality trajectory guides the most mundane aspects of our behavior - consuming and producing - that has created our world as it currently stands. And it is a change at this most fundamental level that will create a different world.

Spiritual Technology

Along with the spiritual trajectory, there is a simple spiritual technology that furthers our perception of beauty, complexity, integrity and resilience. If we are to work with these four conditions as an ethical guide, then it behooves us to resonate with them more deeply.

Spiritual technology follows a certain procedure. It begins by being quiet and becoming physically settled. Secondly, when I have become still, I bring my attention to I, the conscious sentient being within this body. I allow my mind to rest in this awareness. Then I practice observing the mind in a state of conscious acceptance, free of judgment. When the mind wanders - and it will because that is its nature - I bring it back to a peaceful self-awareness. Observe how the mind responds to thoughts of peace. This quiet observation results in a heightened awareness that is integrated, kind, certain and loving. The fourth stage is a

subsequent deepening of concentration. This cultivates a much more highly attuned sense of the world around us and our place within it.

In this state of being, we more easily resonate with the states and conditions of beauty, complexity, integrity and resilience - the core constructs of our ethical framework. Using this spiritual technology we also diminish our self-imposed thought-based boundaries that have disconnected us from our deepest and eternal reality. Humanity en masse is currently so off station, that we can no longer hear our deepest reverence for life: living souls, the material world, and the energy of creation, are inextricable components of life. The fifth stage is to - while in this state of awareness - connect the mind and heart to the abundant source of living energy of love and creation.

Spiritual technology does not ask anyone to let go of their culture or beliefs, their religious or secular practices or non-practices. Spiritual technology invites people to reconnect with the most inner aspect of the self and, by association, the other. Spiritual technology encourages people to connect with the energy of creation; some may understand this as a divine, loving and living being, others as a state of pure creative energy. What is required is not a change of world-view, but reflection, silence and inner observation of I, the living energy within this world of the five elements. Then I become more keenly aware of the conditions of beauty, complexity, integrity and resilience within me, and so consequently support the same in the world around me.

In Conclusion

An ethical framework based in spirituality will stop our habit of finding moral grounds to stop the mechanics of change. There are no quick fixes. There is no one-off technical solution. It is only a change of inner attitude and awareness that will change the world externally. And it is understanding the spiritual trajectory and acknowledging the flow-on effects of our choices and behaviors that will facilitate a better existence for all. And this is why understanding the spiritual construct of ethics is so crucial.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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