

Professor Jem Bendell (Founder of Deep Adaptation Forum)
in conversation with Sister Jayanti
14th April 2020 – online Question and Answer

Link to Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8tt0CvA6aM>



Q. Jem Bendell; A. Sister Jayanti)

This month joining us is Sister Jayanti, European Director of the Brahma Kumaris, a global spiritual movement that started in India. She works with them as a spiritual teacher and someone who engages politicians and UN system on their behalf, for about 50 years. Wonderful that Sister Jayanti is joining us from Rajasthan, India. Thank you

A. Hello. Om Shanti, a greeting of peace to you Jem and all our viewers and listeners

Q.I am really grateful you are still able to join us, as it must have been quite a momentous few weeks, as the leader of the Brahma Kumaris, Dadi Janki, has just passed aged 104, so I presume there must be quite a lot of reflection and celebration about her. What are your memories of her that feel important to you at this time? It is such a worrying time, globally and so uncertain with the global Covid pandemic...

A. She was a giant of a person, at 4ft 11"! Her personality was radiant and amazing. I had known her most of my life, 62 years and lived with her for 40 years. She would always say to me 'don't think'. Keep your mind peaceful and quiet, then the right thoughts will come. If you let your mind spin, you won't understand clearly what is going on and things will get jumble and confused. Here is a woman who spent a lifetime going deep within herself, to explore what is inside the inner world. Thoughts, feelings, conscience and consciousness. How to purify the mind to have just clean

and noble thoughts. This was Dadi, and she was a World Server, who served all her life, right until the end.

Q. That is lovely. I didn't know she had said 'don't think. Perfect! There is a lot of thinking right now. Not just to make meaning of what is happening or reduce the vulnerability we face. People also want to narrate what this means for the future and what comes next and there is some anxiety in that and I find myself drawn into that. This is a lovely message for me

A. Yes I thought this would be the appropriate thing Dadi would be saying at this moment. Just let the mind be peaceful and calm and then I will know what to think. There is so much information and misinformation and difficult to feel clearly. Creating space within is very important and then my inspiration and the connection with the One above will be clear and strong and I will be able to take that guidance also.

Q. There is a lot of anxiety both in UK and in India and the policies that are being taken to reduce the risk have further consequences with further anxiety and suffering. I have looked back at your interviews and seen that you say that the Power of Love can be a protection. When we are feeling anxious in society, we can step back to that feeling and act from that place. There are anxieties around not just the pandemic, but climate change and the impact on climate for example on the harvests and individuals etc. How do we go about connecting with that Power of love?

A. My experience and understanding tell me that the natural state of the human spirit is love and compassion and when we lose touch with ourselves because we are so occupied with the externals of life. Lockdown has removed some distractions and given us a bit of space. But then many things come up inside ourselves. But if I go deeper and connect with the being within then in that awareness, there is the pure love and compassion. If we see Lockdown as an opportunity and not as a punishment, I can feel the love that is there within me and allow it to emerge and be expressed. It is not a romantic love, but an all embracing and inclusive love, so that I see you as my brother and every person in the human family, as my family. When there is that interconnectedness that I feel, that pure love will stimulate me to go beyond 'my wants' to something higher. Then I see how we can all cooperate together and carry humanity forward to the next step of our evolution. I offer a ray of hope! I sense what is happening is a very dark period, in India described as the Iron Age, and beyond that comes the light. Through this transition period there is a huge amount of upheaval within ourselves and externally also, nationally and internationally. It starts from inside and if we deal with the negativity within ourselves, and allow the goodness to be expressed then together we can create a better world for all of us.

Q. I like that and I would like to come back to that but I am really interested in the inner upheavals, as people realise their futures are not what they thought, perhaps their income or job is not what they thought and new fears arise. Meditation is offered by the Brahma Kumaris, and indeed many other traditions, as a way of settling thoughts, and

experiencing the universal love you have described; and aligning ones own will to divine will. Could you say something more on meditation. Some see it as a way of 'turning away' from the pain and suffering of the world. Rather than finding a way of being with and calmly engaged with the pain and suffering of the world and calm with the pain and suffering within the self in this uncertain time. How do you see it?

A. It has become a spiritual supermarket and we can take off the shelf what we wish maybe. I practise Raja Yoga Meditation. Yoga means union, connection. What we are talking about here is recognising the identity of the self as the inner being and through my thoughts connecting with the Divine, so that union happens and I experience that relationship. Throughout the day and night the mind is functioning with fast thoughts. In meditation we are learning to have mastery over our thoughts, so that we can slow down the mind. This happens in a natural way. If we start this inner journey and look at the thoughts, generally they slow down. Then we can select the thought we wish to focus on. A thought of love or peace and then we connect with our goodness. This goodness lies within every human being. I know I carry a mixture within, but I can deal with that later on. So I connect with the purity and peace and in that higher consciousness, I can be aware of the presence of the Divine. When I am struggling with negative emotions such as fear or jealousy, I am very far away from that level of consciousness where I can be aware of this presence. But when I clear the mind and raise the goodness within, then with my thoughts I make contact. This is not stopping thoughts. Externally I am not speaking, but internally I am starting to have a conversation with The Divine. I am building a relationship and this means I am getting two things... additional love, peace and strength I need but also receiving the power I need to deal with all the human frailties that we all have that hold us back - our egos and anger. I am actually then preparing myself to engage more fully with individuals and the world at large. So this is not a meditation that leads to escapism or denial but a preparation to engage fully with what is highest within myself. Instead of then being needy, wanting and taking. I am not talking about money or food. I am talking about the inner thirst of the soul. When we are seeking love, happiness etc and wanting someone to provide that. But now when we fill ourself we can start giving. This changes the dynamics in the relationships I have. It also changes our horizons and we go above the limitations of family, community but we see the unlimited family of humanity that I belong to.

Q. Thanks for this. It was only a year ago when I started to practise meditation more fully, in particularly during a VipisanaInsight Meditation, that the power of it became clear to me. Previously I thought it was about calming the breathing and slowing the thoughts, therefore somehow feeling a bit more relaxed. However it has brought this awareness of thoughts and feelings, emotions and sensations happening within me, rather than defining me. In the past month at different times, I have felt a bit panicked about the situation living here in Indonesia and I realise that having the ability to watch what is happening within the body and to not act from any

immediate fear, is something I have gained and stays with me everyday even when I am not meditating.

Brahma Kumaris meditate with eyes open. Is that to do with everyday life?

A. Yes, it is. For example as we sit and engage together, if I am seeing you as the inner being, the light that shines within the connection is a very different one to the Professor and me, one with no scientific education, there would be tensions. As it is we are both meditators and we are connecting soul to soul and there is an easy rapport. We have only met for a couple of hours before and yet it is a natural connection. This is due to open eyed meditation. If I closed my eyes in meditation it might be easier temporarily but when we train ourselves to see and not be distracted and keep the thoughts on a higher level, then I continue with my actions and responsibilities. Karma Yoga: action in a higher consciousness. Then I can engage in speaking, walking, driving, whatever it is but in the awareness of soul. It could change the world. If there was a recipe to change the world this could be it.

Q. I am really interested as you live in community both in London and now in Mount Abu. There are benefits of this in lockdown but there can be increased sense of vulnerability due to possibilities of transmission. So many of us are feeling vulnerable to disease etc. I was wondering how your perspective on the true nature of the self, influences how you feel about your vulnerability and sense of mortality. In the Brahma Kumaris you talk about soul consciousness and identity. Can you tell us a bit about that?

A. Yes thank you. It is a fact if I am aware of my own inner identity as that being within. We have talked about the mastery of thoughts and feelings and it extends to the mastery of the physical senses. I have learnt more and more that it is I the soul that lives deep inside. I am the inner being in charge of this physical body. My thoughts and feelings impact the body. We are used to thinking about this the other way. I hurt my finger and I feel pain. My attitude then moves to who caused the hurt and often blame etc. Usually the body influences the soul. We are reversing the process and ensuring the soul takes charge of the body. If I can be filled with love, and faith and hope then my immunity is enhanced. When there is hope in the heart the immunity goes up and when there is fear it goes down. Having this awareness of the inner being at this time I am keeping my immunity high and I am aware that the quality of my thoughts will help me feel better, whether I am sick or not. To not be afraid is protection in itself. This is a time that people are recognising that apart from washing hands, maintaining social distance etc....the way we think and feel will help us stay well, or allow us to succumb to viruses. Even if the body is fragile and the virus has come, I will be able to recover more quickly if I have the thoughts and perception of what is going on.

I have come across news and studies recently about the connection between mind body in terms of immunity and including even altruistic feelings and the power on the immune system. Obviously sometimes some of that evidence and philosophy can be misused and taken out of context.

'You got ill because you worried too much' for example. I am interested in what you mentioned about hope. Hope means different things in different spiritual traditions. Even within Christianity for example between Catholicism and Protestantism there are different debates.

Q My understanding of hope in relationship to soul, doesn't mean much for the hope of the future in this body. By extension it doesn't mean much for how societies will be. But the hope is more about how I will be: how people I interact with can be no matter what is happening. Whether it is an asteroid hitting us from outer space, or a virus sweeping the world that we cant control; or climate change becoming a runaway phenomenon. How do you talk about hope? It is a hope for the soul's journey, or one more made manifest in the material plane?

A .The whole drama of this world in which we are living in, as a stage in which people come and go and play their roles on the stage....it is the interaction between soul and matter. It is never that the soul is here on its own. It is in matter, in the body playing its role on the stage. So yes the hope that the soul is going to feel strong, bright and beautiful and return to its original state of joy and love that I used to know, at some point, and now is possible again to return to that. It is also connected to the physical dimension. There is a time of darkness and one of light. We have been through the period of darkness and we are now approaching a world of light. We are seeing huge upheaval but beyond that, the world will be a better place and humans will be experiencing their own highest state and sharing those qualities with each other. So that when people interact it will be with kindness and love. When people speak it will be words that are supportive and encouraging, rather than the harshness we see in today's world.

Q. I am really interested in this as the Founder of the Brahma Kumaris, Dada Lekraj, in 1937, had that great vision of suffering, with war and natural and technological disasters. So there was that sense of future cataclysm, which is in many spiritual traditions as well, apocalypse and rebirth. However rebirth means different things too, it might not just be for humanity, but for consciousness, here or in other parts of the cosmos for example. But at the Brahma Kumaris, you have had this in your cosmology, in your religious stories and outlook since your beginning. What could we learn from that as we are waking up on the planet to multiple crises, and things are getting much worse with huge death and suffering. What could people waking up to this predicament learn from how the Brahma Kumaris has lived with this expectation of a form of collapse of the iron age?

A. We have always kept the vision of a better world ahead of us. But alsomore than that, what we do is that whilst living in this world we don't get trapped in the possessiveness and attachments connected to this world. This is an important part of the whole story.If I get attached to even a little thing, that will pull my energy towards itself. But if I can know that this body of mine is a fantastic instrument, very precious, but I am detached

from the limited consciousness that the body imposes on me. When I think that I am Jayanti and this and this, there is a whole trap I am falling into.

Q. Yes, that sounds true for me too. The incredible letting go of realising that life as we know it right now is not as it always will be. That creates some distance which allows me to really think about what I most value, rather than just live from habit in this society.

A. Yes, when I live in the state of limited identity then the colour of my skin, the gender, age, possessiveness of relationships; the position in which I hold myself in society and the tradition I am supposed to follow are all a cage in which I put myself into. Connected to all those limitations is the ego, anger, greed and materialism we are seeing currently. They are all traps. Spirituality teaches us to go out of traps and be free. When I can be free in awareness of spirit then I am the master and not the body, which I use in the best possible way. Can the mind be full of noble and altruistic thoughts? Can I make sure my heart is not tiny and only for me? Can my heart be open, big, generous and compassionate. Can my hands be ones that can care and heal and share with others..So I am using the physical body in a conscious way. No longer out of the bondages of habit, because this is what others are doing and I have to do also. In competition there is also conflict that arises. Can I go out of these things to the highest awareness, the original human state, of peace, love and truth. Can I go back to that and maintain the awareness of the inner being, then it is easy to access these qualities that are within me.

When I am thinking of hope, I am thinking about the One Up Above who is always benevolent. Then I see that life is also benevolent. There are things I go through that are uncomfortable, but there are lessons to learn from these, so I can come to the understanding of what the benevolence is. You mentioned that people having the possibility of time about thinking more deeply what is going on. I see this as the benevolence of Covid 19 as giving us this opportunity.

Q. I see. The Brahma Kumaris is the world's largest spiritual organisation run by women and leadership by women has been a central part of your organisation and how it functions. What could others learn from this and this style of leadership. Deep Adaptation is becoming a movement of sorts so what could we learn why leadership from women is really important?

A. I think women have more awareness of what it is to nurture and sustain. Sustainability is a big word. A natural feature of women is this ability. When the Founder wanted women to take on this role that was part of the thinking. Women also should be given their equal right in society so in the future there is balance. I would recommend that within your own leadership you make sure you have women with this innate sense of sustainability and nurture. Women, also bring with them too that sense that they are not just thinking for themselves but about others around them too. That innate sense of service is quite inborn. It is a feminine aspect that men too can have and develop within themselves. Thinking about the

collective, the whole, the people. Rather than the facts, figures, finance and logistics. To have the right brain come in..

Q Yes, I sometimes can accidentally get into squabbles with men of the same age as to who is more right. So it is not just logistics and money, but categorising, labelling and defining as part of the desire to have agency, control and oversight. And the spiritual dimension, the All, is somehow ineffable and ultimately unknowable, so that whole process to label and describe is somehow futile although interesting.

A. Control and power games have determined the period of the last 1,000 years, and created wars and conflict. It is time to get away from that external side of control and conflict. Spiritual power is the power of love and compassion.

Q I want to ask you about some lifestyle choices. It has been coming up in debates the concern about climate change, whether is it cutting carbon omissions or drawing them down. Or is it just preparing for ongoing disruption to our lives, which is more what deep adaptation forum and movement is about. People talk about diet and I think most BK's are vegetarians.

I was wondering why do you choose the vegetarian life, including from a spiritual perspective. This would be really helpful for people to hear.

A Let me start from the immediate factors. Health: Many switch to a vegetarian diet because it is a healthy diet. Think of the antibiotics and that 70% of antibiotics that are made are used in the animal industry, as they are kept in such close quarters that they wouldn't survive without them. But what is it doing to me? A plant based diet is absolutely the right one to have in terms of our human development. Secondly the ecological aspect and the need to move to a plant based diet so we are releasing land space and water for everyone, rather than just a handful of people. The third aspect is spiritual. If my food is coming from non-violence sources, then that is going to be enabling the mind to be more peaceful. The spiritual side is that when we take life for the sake of feeding ourselves....do unto others, what you would have them do unto you.....it is a golden rule generally for humanity. If I am killing for my food and taste, then my mind will always be in a state of upheaval, in which there will never be peace. When we wish peace in the world our sources of food need to be peaceful too.

Q What with factory farming there is so much unnecessary suffering in the animal food supply chain now. So something to think about... The people in the Deep Adaptation space generally anticipate a collapse of this industrial, consumer way of life, with full supermarkets. Some respond to that by living closer to the land and more self sufficient and so there can be reason to keep chickens, pigs etc. Others feel that there is so much suffering ahead that all my own stories of what I believe in and who I am are crumbling, I just want to live as lovingly and kindly as possible and not contribute to the suffering of any sentient being. So it is really interesting

to see the different ways of responding to such an upheaval in our ways of live, and that is already upon us what with coronavirus.

A. Absolutely. The more information we can share the easier it is for people to make the choices that they are comfortable with.

Q What is the Brahma Kumaris doing now in response to this corona virus pandemic?

A. In India we have a huge community and we are able to look after many others in a physical way. We have space given to the Government for bringing people for quarantine, and patients. We have provided buildings in one part of our campus for doctors and nurses to bring and care for people. On another level, within our community, when there are people who are vulnerable or isolated we are providing food etc. But I think the most important thing we are doing is helping to uplift spirits. Staying in contact with zoom and reaching out to people. Our community classes stopped a month ago, so we have been engaging with online activities from meditations online, teaching, regular daily classes, public events online.....the numbers we are getting is an indication that people are valuing this a lot.

Q. Can people find the meditation you are offering on brahmakumaris.org and can people make donations to your humanitarian work online?

A. Yes indeed

Q from listener: I live in a rural area in the centre of the United States and thank you it was good to hear you today. There is a lot of knowing how we want to be but we are not achieving this. For example wishing to have a more quiet mind even when circumstances are tumultuous. Not meeting that ideal brings me into conflict with myself and it seems to make things even worse, with the comparison of where I would like to be and where I am. I wonder whether you have any comments with working with this.

A Thank you for this question and sure its one many others also have. If I can develop my own inner power then I will be able to achieve the things you shared. On my own this is difficult. But if I connect with The Higher Source, I can draw power within myself. Dramatic change is then possible. More than I think is possible maybe. It can give me greater love, peace and an awareness of joy and I will be able to start filling myself with spiritual energy and power and use it in my life. Even a short practise of meditation everyday can bring a huge benefit. When we experience the benefits we want to increase and enhance it and it becomes a natural incentive to continue. As Jem said since practising in a more regular way there has been very visible results experience.

Q. Yes, I can claim that, although not sure if my partner would agree. I keep trying. There is also a sense of self-acceptance that we, in a sense, will never get this right and that is ok. We just keep falling away and returning back to the effort and state of love. We have some principles in the Deep Adaptation Forum for how we dialogue about these difficult issues about anticipating and transcending impending collapse. We don't just say

we are interested in compassion, curiosity and respect but that we are returning to compassion, returning to curiosity and returning to respect.

These are stressful situations, stressful times. Some people are saying that humanity is having to have conversations that it has never had. Individual civilisations have faced demise. Now it is the awareness we have of the threat to the whole of humanity at this time is quite unprecedented and of course we are all going to get a bit stressed and naughty and so it is that returning again and again.

A Yes this is good. I like this. It is within ourselves and when we forget, we need to remind ourselves and return to that.

Q. Actually remembrance , our remembrance of our souls unity with the All that is in many spiritual traditions. It is in sufism. I like this.

Q from listener: I'm in New York. My question is about the transformation that humanity may need to go through. And that is we are much too wealthy. It is this wealth that is creating all the problems we are having and I see the only path forward is one of much greater love. I would like to hear about the connection between spiritual fulfilment; being content, happy and satisfied with ones being and having the practical effect of reducing our wealth which makes this massive carbon footprint.

A. I would say it is a question of the imbalance of the distribution of wealth. There is a tiny proportion, maybe 20% that is wealthy and within that 4% who is hugely wealthy. Over 80% of humanity isn't wealthy. I am not just talking about the lack of spiritual wealth of love and joy. But I am talking about physical survival. Some of the 80% might have some things some of the time, but we are talking about distribution and how inequality rules the world at the moment. If I can take it on a personal level first and learn to make the spiritual connection and allow my own love, joy and purity to increase then I can do is be content and understand my happiness doesn't come from a bigger car, or better house etc. That is a reality: Once we have enough wealth to maintain physical needs, beyond that isn't adding to anyone's happiness and there is a lot of research that tells us this. We need a certain amount for our physical needs. Beyond that what I need to do is develop my own inner treasures and know that my happiness is within. On a practical, external level, it means I can simplify. I just don't need all the trappings that society is used to today. Then I can simplify and reduce my carbon footprint considerably and there is also then more available for others to share. I also become more free: whilst we are trapped by 'wanting' externally, I am trapped by those things. I will feel very distressed and unhappy if then they are missing in my life. If I have simplified my life and learn't to have the happiness within that comes from that inner state of contentment then I will be able to manage my life in a much better life.

Thank you. I have found myself able to loosen my habits of consumption which had developed from living life without thinking.

Q from listener: I'm in Indonesia. The spiritual path for me is just as much about being able to live with the pain and devastation that humanity continues to create, not just having a way to return to the love and beauty that is essential to every being. How do we avoid spiritual bypass and consequentially not addressing in our own lives, and in the outside world, tough decisions and actions?

A. As a spiritually aware person I am very much here in the world. I am not in denial of the world on any level. I know the world is going through a lot of pain and suffering and I am part of that world and have been through that pain and suffering. But what I have done is look at the self from the inner perspective of the soul. If the body is unwell I won't let my body go through suffering like I used to do. I will say OK. Let me detach. Let me give good vibrations to my body so that the healing process of the body takes over. I will take the medication I need. But I will use the power of mind and the power of love and truth to go through my physical body so I am not suffering as I used to before. Otherwise we can get into 'woe is me' and we struggle. Now I am able to send vibrations of peace through my body. So I am learning to deal with whatever is the suffering and pain in a different way. If I see another who is suffering maybe I can say to them to come back to that inner awareness of peace that you are.... And holding this awareness of peace can help you breathe more easily. Probably it will. Meditation teaches us very practical ways. It is not a denial of pain and suffering but how I deal with it differently. Someone used this technique re breathlessness just recently and said that 'I felt I couldn't breathe and then I remembered I am a soul and I could feel my body relax and I could send those vibrations of peace to my body'. There are different ways we can learn about dealing with pain and suffering.

Q. I see a paradox. How do we develop equanimity, which isn't necessary serenity, it is being able to be with whatever is, without craving or wanting to be peaceful and help everyone else to be as peaceful as quickly as possible. To be present to the suffering, within the self and the world; but not wallow in it, nor be adverse to it. It is some kind of stillness to be fully present rather than lost to our own cravings and aversions. It is a difficult one. Maybe it comes really simply if I don't think!

A.I have had a brilliant master and teacher in DadiJanki. I saw her go through so many illnesses. Another story for another time.

Final Question

Q from listener. I'm in Edinburgh. What do you do when you don't have a habit of meditation in a developed way but you find yourself in a situation that is difficult, eg you have been caught by the virus. Not many hopes are there for you, but maybe meditation is there for you, but you don't know much how it works nor are motivated. What do you do?

A. A simple way to start on the inner journey, is to read whatever is uplifting and inspirational for you. If you have share with the ones you love. Technology is amazing. There is the dark side I am aware of, but the positive side is kicking in during the present time. So run these

inspirational thoughts through the mind. To allow the mind to reflect on things of beauty, truth, love and joy is meditation. Don't make it complicated or a mystery. When we reflect on higher things, we are moving in the direction of meditation. So share good things with each other.

Q. That is interesting to hear, rather than how to cross your legs on a cushion! Brilliant

A. Not at all

Q. Thanks very much Sister Jayanti. And I hope you are safe and well in a difficult situation in India.

A. Your questions have been beautiful Jem, very deeply spiritual and an indication of you returning to that space of love and truth in yourself.

Q.Thank you. I have that 'don't think' thing. I need more days to do this after a habit of a lifetime trying to be clever.

A.Try it in small doses.

Q Blessings to everyone from around the world joining us and see those from the Deep Adaptation Forum in a months time for another Q&A. Bye bye