

EDITORIAL

There is in our day a deep disillusionment. Many people no longer believe that the endless growth of science will create a happier and more just world. There is a widespread distrust in technological progress, professionalized rationality, masculine, detached control, and the conquest of nature. We have seen how a political and technological bureaucracy can become the tool for the insanity of the Holocaust; how the endless production and consumption of gadgets coexists with a population vexed systemic injustice and violence; how a scientific establishment of unprecedented scope and power devotes itself to the creation of weapons of mass destruction; and – perhaps most terrifyingly – how our entire civilization has developed forms of life that are toxic for us and for the natural world as a whole.

We have watched the self-proclaimed experts of “scientific” medicine, engineering, psychology, social planning, and politics fail to solve these ills. A very long shadow has been cast of the supposed light of a purely scientific and technological understanding of society, knowledge, and selfhood. This spirit of detached rationality considers the mind separate from the body, the universe a barren environment purged of the sacred, the natural world a simple resource of conquest, and human beings social ciphers to be manipulated by scientifically minded administrators. This scientific technological mindset has failed.

In the existential realisation of this failure, the world has been witnessing a growing and deepening interest in spirituality in several ways. In the West, the use of psychedelic chemicals provided experiences of nonordinary states of consciousness. When the highs wore off, drugs were shown to be perilous, as well as temporarily enlightening, and the limits of artificially induced transcendent states were revealed. It was then natural to try to find teachers who could guide us in the exploration of mystical states of consciousness. Varieties of meditation, yoga, breath control, and guided visualisation promised that we might integrate the visions and insights of drug states into our daily lives in a healthy and ultimately much more personally and socially rewarding manner than simply “turning on”.

Part of the feminist struggle for political equality and social freedom has included the transformation of patriarchal religious ideas and institutions and the creation of new ones. Women have rightly criticised the distortions of male-dominated religions, challenging conventional understandings of sin, God, nature, enlightenment, and spiritual development. Moving beyond critique, feminist spiritual teachers also constructed new models of religious community, worship, faith and human relations.

Environmental consciousness has taken a spiritual form as people began to question our technological assumption that the earth is a "thing" devoid of spiritual value. Spiritual ecologists have started imagining the possibility that the ecosphere might need to be saved, not only to protect human life, but because it has a value of its own. There has been a corresponding interest in teachings from *wicca* (goddess religion), the traditions of indigenous peoples, and the development of an eco-feminism which view our relations with the natural world, not as simple exploitation but as a sacred exchange.

We are witnessing, then, the emergence of not one but several "new age" spiritualities, encompassing a variety of spiritual experience and teaching which share and attempt to relate to the power of the Mystery, crossing over into and through and from the lives of human beings into the lives of all created beings. They are spiritualities which encourage the fullest possible spiritual awakening - in which individual, community, and world can discover the truth and the power of the Spirit together.

The writers in this volume are concerned to explore concerns growing out of just such spiritual disillusionment and aspiration. Not all of the papers explicitly examine either Mother Earth or such new age spiritualities, but there are in each certainly clear implications for these.

We open our volume with a call for new cosmologies, new perspectives for our age. Arising out of the kind of disillusionment of which we have been speaking, attention is drawn to the dominant culture of the West which has destroyed the different rhythms of the world with its science, its war, its economics. Not only this but the defining patriarchal paradigm has woven the concept of gender

deeply into the fabric of the dominant cosmology. In all of this Corinne Kumar seeks to make connections outside the dominant discourse of knowledge, discovering the cosmologies of those who have been on the periphery. She suggests that the answers are "blowin in the wind" (to borrow words from a popular folk song), especially the wind from the South, bearing the wisdom of the civilizations of Asia, Africa, Latin America; the South as the voices and wisdoms of women, in the hope of creating new possibilities for our times.

In projecting "the next step in humanity's evolutionary journey," Robert Keck puts the history of the human race under the lens of "deep value trend analysis" in an attempt to discern a pattern of maturation taking place in humanity's soul. Having passed through two previous evolutionary epochs, each with its own unique deep value system and having a specific development purpose, the race is poised at the entrance of a third epoch, that of humanity's adulthood. The writer perceives a new deep value system emerging, meaning that the shape of the 21st century will be radically different, with new notions of heaven and earth, divine and human, matter and spirit.

Not unmindful of the global crisis brought about by humankind's alienation from the very earth that sustains all life, Anne Pearson examines Hindu women's *vrat* (votive calendrical rites) tradition and finds a prototype of an emerging global eco-spirituality. She probes three aspects of the *vrat* tradition, and discovers in each its own constitutive characteristic value - all central to any spirituality - particularly one that accents the sacrality and interconnectedness of the earth and the life it supports.

In developing contemporary eco-spiritualities it is commonplace to draw on images inherent in the widespread symbolic conflation of woman and earth. Janet Chawla, however, raises some serious questions about its inherently androcentric focus on seed as biological and social metaphor. Our fourth article argues that the woman-earth simulacrum, involving as it does an androcentric foregrounding of seed and a structuring of social relations in such a manner as to control women's sexuality, divest mothers of rights, and prevent daughters from inheriting land, is in fact, misogynist in character. The author proceeds to draw on her own field research on Delhi

slum women's experiences of childbirth rites to suggest an alternate woman-centered paradigm of ritual performance involving the use of grain as central symbolic medium.

In the final article, Gabriele Dietrich unpacks the imagery of the world as the body of God so as to reflect on questions of ecology as they relate to the injustice and oppression experienced by women with whom the writer is closely associated. Weighing in with an implicit critique of "new age spiritualities," she observes that ecology is a basic survival issue to the poor in countries that are rural based and poverty stricken. The argument proceeds with the contention that in such a context ecology is not a mere striving for reconciliation of earth and human beings, honouring cosmic forces and non-human life forms. Rather ecology comes into proper focus by setting human beings in relationship with each other in the day-to-day- survival struggles for water, a piece of land to dwell on, and so on. The author concludes with a theological reflection in which she elaborates an ecological vision of the body of God as an economy of sharing in which life on earth can be sustained in communitarian solidarity, which both sustains our vision and protects life itself.

In conclusion, the editors of the *Journal of Dharma* desire to add their voice to the world chorus honouring the late *Ācārya* Bede Griffiths, *Gurudev* to many of us. So much has been written by *Swāmiji* himself and so much has been written about him. Nor is desire a guarantee of adequacy. Perhaps "river of compassion," the title of his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, his major life's work, provides a fitting metaphor with which to offer our *praṇāms*. A more common rendering might be *karuṇasāgara*, and indeed, if anything was characteristic of *Gurudev* it was his seemingly limitless sensitivity, his compassion. Certainly it was his amazing sensitivity to the Spirit that brought him to India in the first place. Here, it was his universal compassion that gave birth to the vision for Saccidānanda Āśram – a human community in harmony with its environment and open to God, God in the widest possible sense as revealed in different religious traditions. In the āśram the *Ācārya* sought to break down the hierarchy of religious life in order to create a community of equality, sharing and openness. Nor did the complexities of such a task elude him. It was not simply a question of mixing religions or mixing people,

but a very deep sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit which leads to openness in all these different ways.

His *karuṇā*, like that of the Buddha, made *Swāmiji* acutely aware of the extent of human suffering, caused by human greed and the oppressive, unjust structures of human society. And yet, in his compassion he looked on the contemporary world with unwavering faith for he saw in it a wealth of initially diverse movements ultimately destined to converge. There were the holistic movement, the ecological movement, the feminist movement. It was of vital importance for him that people discover the feminine dimension in their lives, and linked to this was the peace movement, for a world driven by the masculine, aggressive, dominating energy, conflict seems inevitable. There were numerous other separate but interrelated movements, not least of them the movement towards community, of which we have just spoken, which must inevitably come together. Of all these *Gurudev* wrote creatively and copiously, culminating in his sharing of *A New Vision of Reality*. As a token of the tribute offered by the *Journal of Dharma*, we share with our readers a personal reflection on this, *Swamiji's* last book, by Raimundo Panikkar, an associate editor of the journal.

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