

Spiritual Traditions Fail the Global Crises - Part I

By Keith Salmon

Why Our Spiritual Traditions Have Failed to Respond to the Global Crises – And How We Can Change That Now

Given that the loss of the sense of the sacred in our lives – our relationship with the Earth as well as our values, our world-view, our systems – is clearly destroying the Earth and driving us to extinction – one would think that religions and spiritual paths would be the first to respond, to restore the sacred in our lives, to be on the front lines in regenerating our planet and society. Yet both the traditional religions and New Age, post-modern spiritual approaches have failed to respond effectively to the global crises. Instead of challenging and transforming patriarchy, materialism and capitalism, the sources of the crises, they have often become complicit with them, both directly entwined with them and complacent about changing them. How can we bring spirituality, then, into a direct and powerful response to the existential crises we face, rather than simply serving the forces of escapism, fatalism, elitism and complacency?

How we can create a new spiritual activist paradigm that can truly rise instead to the challenges of these times – the clarion call from nature herself and our own evolutionary imperative for radical transformation, both of our consciousness and our systems – in a fresh and effective way?

Today the climate emergency, and impending social and ecological collapses it augurs, can no longer be ignored. Even the schoolchildren are rising up for their survival; it is a sacrilege to pretend not to hear their cries. If our spiritual orientations have been too weak or obsolete to defend them and our Earth, it is clear we need new visions.

First of all, we need to know that going beyond our ego is not about disappearing into a void, a detached transcendence from the world, but going beyond the illusion of separation between ourselves and the world; and further, that that illusion itself is built upon a still deeper illusion that either are ever separate from their own eternal Source. What does this mean? That both we and the world (we and “the Earth”, we and the “other”, human or non-human) are held in an infinite space of light, peace and joy that, as we evolve, flows powerfully through both, healing the illusory rift between them. This evolutionary unfolding from the depths of our own true being lifts the veil not only between ourselves and the “other” but also between the present moment and the eternal Presence in which it is appearing, the here and now of our crisis-torn world and the infinite light of healing and guidance that bathes it, washes through it.

A true nondual realization does not pit our own liberation against compassionate action or caring for our world. It suffuses us with the love and wisdom to heal our ravaged planet, and also breaks open the time-space matrix and delivers us to our true nature, which is boundless, endless and whole. Taken in this way, our crises themselves are transmuted into an extraordinary stroke of grace, a source of salvation on both counts, worldly and eternal, of this world and beyond it. The seeming curse of destruction that has fallen upon us becomes a portal of blessing, redemption, an opening into the deathless.

I said “first of all”, but really, if we begin to see this, we have the key to all: both healing our crises, planetary transformation, and a true spiritual awakening – the key that can crack open the illusory divisions that separate us from each other, our precious Earth, and, in the same stroke, our own infinite Source; the stroke of grace that can break open the grid of illusion, the prison bars of time and space, that keep us separated from our own limitless true nature, both in its formless Essence and all its myriad forms. In this most portentous of crises, we are being handed the master-key to the mystery of who we really are. There is a mercy in this crisis, unfathomable to our minds, but which if we meet it empty-handed, showers us with its light.

I believe the challenges we face today, tremendous as they are, are calling us to no less than this total awakening – an awakening that can empower the healing we need both personally and collectively, at both inner and outer levels. We are called, as never before, to an awakening that spans all the dimensions of our being; that heals all divisions within us and all the divisions between us. It is a mandate we cannot ignore: it is truly now or never.

Some say it is too late, but I believe it is our own choices that can make us or break us. It is our own intention to heal, both ourselves and our planet, an unstoppable commitment to do whatever it takes; and paradoxically, deep surrender, to the unseen powers of guidance that can help us through this dark and unknown terrain, infusing every step we take with the light of that higher intelligence that has created the entire cosmos.

There is a mystery moving through us, and we need to meet that mystery with both dedicated, fierce willingness and the sweet grace of surrender. In these extraordinary times, we are called to meet our situation with clarity, awe and integrity, all in equal measure. We are called beyond the opposites; to alchemize grief and fear into gratitude, courage and strength; realism and disillusion into inspired vision; humility and unknowing into the power of a collective transformation at a heroic, out-sized scale, a magnitude off all known charts. Something else is charting our way, calling forth a new world from within us, but we have to give ourselves to it, letting go of our hubris, letting go into its hands. And in this total surrender to the forces that made us out of nothing, we become naked channels for the next evolutionary unfolding; mysticism meets action.

When we can see through our chattering, self-identified thoughts, the prison of our own story and mind, and drop deep into our hearts, we come to know ourselves as nothing, and everything at the same time; we come to know who we really are; the infinite, deathless space that contains the whole of creation. This is the key, and power, to healing our own suffering and the rifts between us, the rifts between us and our Earth, the key to our transformation and ultimate liberation. Our liberation is not from life on this Earth, but from the illusion of separation between us and all of existence, in this world and beyond it. When the veil of mind is lifted, even the seeming separation between life and death dissolves. This is the true birth that beckons us, to Heaven here on this Earth and at the same time eternal.

All of this is implicit in the wisdom traditions, but now more than ever before we need to make space for it to come forth, space within ourselves and outer spaces of dialogue, sharing and exploration between us. We have to dust off what no longer serves and clear space for the new to emerge, where the guidance and wisdom most needed today, in response to our unique crises, can become clear and explicit.

For those of us especially who practice Eastern spiritual traditions, we need a more profound and relevant understanding of their true import than we have needed before, a truly non-dual

understanding that overcomes the seeming division between spirit and matter, the transcendent and immanent, our infinite true nature and its manifest forms. We are called now to go beyond the illusion of separation itself, from our own formless Essence and also all its forms, here on Earth, in the present. Spirit is not somewhere else, someplace we need to transcend to: it is here and now, pervading all its own forms, our own forms and all nature. I believe these forms are collapsing now – the forces and forms that sustain us, the rhythms and cycles of nature – because we have not recognized, or failed to honor, the sacredness that pervades them.

This is true, of course, of the Western traditions too – the split between the sacred and the secular has been at the root of our denigration of the Earth, and the gross materialism of our cultures, that has led to our current crises. Creation is the outer face of the Divine, and, as indigenous people have always known, must be treated as sacred, not (from the religious side) some mistake or delusion or vale of woe to be escaped, or (from the secular side) merely a source of resources to be rapaciously extracted, exploited, and wasted.

Yes, it is all a dream, but we need to embrace this dream in love in order to awaken it. We need to embrace in total surrender and love this precious gift of life on Earth, this mystery, not seek to escape it or torture its secrets from it. In this deepest surrender, an inversion, and conversion, takes place; the mystery envelops us and takes us into itself; we enter into communion with its secret power, we merge in the sacred fountain of creation. This is the key that can turn the nightmare we have landed in into a dream bathed in bliss and, deeper still, revelation; the boundless light that streams from our heart, and the heart of all being, the deepest source of our own inner illumination.

Our way forward will be lit from within, and the wisdom we find there, and not the outdated ideas of our mind that have gotten us into our predicament in the first place. In the famous quote from Einstein that has become the slogan of our times, we cannot solve our problems from the same state of consciousness that caused them to begin with. We need to move from a consciousness of separation, which has gotten us into our crises, to a consciousness of our true unity, which can heal and transform them. The ultimatum to awake to the ultimate truth of our being is unequivocally clear.

This is true non-duality, the way we must go to overcome our sense of division between ourselves and others, between ourselves and the Earth, between ourselves and the greater infinite Source of our being that creates and holds all of these, that is their very own nature. Our failure to do so has been at the root of our ecological crises, acute social injustice, economic inequity, loss of hope and meaning, physical and mental health epidemics, cultural degradation. If we are to reverse these, we must return to a Oneness with all that is, and reverse and transform the systems – social, economic, governance, ecological as well as religious – that have been built upon that core error, the sense of separation. The time has come to break open the bubble of this massive delusion that, if left uncorrected, will lead us to mass self-destruction.

When we realize our Oneness with all that is, when the boundaries of our separateness become transparent, we are automatically initiated into the boundless, the deathlessness of our true nature. We are both the infinite and the moment, the infinite space that gives rise to all forms and the forms it gives rise to, the ocean and its waves. Each moment is an entryway into the infinite; non-duality means to realize ourselves as both, and not to set up a false division between them. This is the only way to go – into our true Wholeness – if we are to go forward. Paradoxically, our future depends upon our connection with the timeless, which alone can

infuse us with the ageless wisdom we need to survive and thrive.

Spiritual Traditions Fail the Global Crisis - Part II

By Bayo Akomolafe

Why Our Spiritual Traditions Have Failed to Respond to the Global Crises – And How We Can Change That Now

Many spiritual practitioners shun the social and political realms (even take pride in doing so) but we can no longer afford this. We need a clear-sighted awareness of the social, political, ecological and economic forces at play in the global crises, and an intelligent, active approach to transforming them. We cannot simply pretend to transcend them, ignore them or wish them away; they will come back to haunt us if we do not bring all our faculties into a full-hearted, conscious response, before the short window of time we have is irrevocably closed to us. The crises are occurring, no doubt, to wake us from our false sense of separation, from our Earth, each other and our own Source – it is up to us, and our conscience, to respond to the call.

Why has this not been happening, especially in our spiritual scenes; what are the signs this is starting to change; and what can we do to accelerate the momentum?

I mentioned earlier that neither the traditional religions nor New Age or post-modern spiritual paths have effectively challenged our systems, nor offered new visions of the magnitude needed now. The traditional religions, of course, are slow to respond, since their role is inherently conservative: to conserve and uphold the structures of society, and thus to support, in general, the social and political status quo. The New Age spiritual movements and post-modern paths, while offering new approaches – holistic, integral, evolutionary – have also failed to sufficiently challenge the materialistic system that is causing the crises; instead, a comfortable marriage has developed during the neo-liberal decades between spirituality and the consumerist capitalist system.

This is true both of the New Age movements, that cater mainly to well-off white elites, looking for stress relief and personal spiritual freedom, and the integral, evolutionary scenes, that have tended more and more to move towards business and technology, superhuman and transhuman memes, and looked down their nose at anything “green”: grassroots community, the feminine, social-political movements for justice, systemic change and deep, ecological renewal. Yet these latter movements are more pertinent than ever today, for healing our ecological crises and extreme social rifts. If we are not to devolve into a dystopian, inhuman world (robotic or barbaric), we have to renew and evolve our humanity and true community.

In our current society, what we do for our livelihood, how we earn and spend our money, is often dissociated from the moral and spiritual tenets we might otherwise espouse. Our “worth” is measured by our financial and material wealth, no matter how unjust or destructive the means by which that wealth was acquired. This is true in the mainstream culture, but insidiously affects alternative currents too; no matter how pure their original intentions, market forces and business interests inevitably take over, vitiating the true potential for change.

In the New Age, post-modern, neo-liberal era, spirituality has become complicit with capitalism,

yet if it is going to act as a genuine force for transformation, this has got to change. Business interests – making a profit with “spiritual products and services”, therapies, technologies and high-cost retreats – all too often have co-opted the original, altruistic ideals of personal and planetary transformation, of spirituality as a force for change that serves the well-being of all. In fact, these are the directions -- business, tech and self-profit, divorced from real care for the Earth and each other – which have gotten us into our troubles in the first place; let’s not allow our spiritual responses, which need to be incisive, inspired and robust, instead be hijacked by the same forces they need powerfully to challenge and change! The truth is “business-as-usual” is no longer an option, least of all in the spiritual world, if it is to be true to its name.

Fortunately, today, this long stagnation seems to be breaking. Increasingly spiritual groups – Christians, Buddhists, yoga, mindfulness and others – are responding to the social and ecological crises, and even coming together in collective action. Yet the missing link still often remains: the failure to clearly acknowledge the importance of systemic global economic transformation – not just individual or local ecological actions; or reforming business practices; or charity or social service -- but a radical whole-scale transformation to a new cooperative, just and regenerative system, based on the deepest spiritual truths of our interconnection and unity. Compassion, prayer and good intentions alone cannot make this happen: it takes dedicated, well-informed and courageous action.

A vanguard of religious groups – notably the Catholics, with the Pope’s hard-hitting “Laudate Sei”; the Buddhists, with Ecodharma, One Earth Sangha, Extinction Rebellion Buddhists; and the Parliament of the World’s Religions itself, with its Climate Emergency Action – are addressing more directly the need for a deep-seated transformation of our global economic system. In these, and other new initiatives, we see very positive signs, and there is, no doubt, more momentum to come. The fact that Marianne Williamson, for instance, is running for president on a spiritual platform for whole-systems transformation attests to the near-miraculous speed with which things are changing now – it would have been unthinkable in the last election!

This sacred activist vision is also, as I see it, closely connected with the spirit of the Divine Feminine that is rising today. First let me say that this does not just involve the empowerment of women; it also vitally includes men. It is about a vital change in the collective consciousness to a more integrative, inclusive approach -- not about polarization, either of gender, culture, race, nationality or any of the other bases that have been dividing us.

It is about a sea-change in our spiritual and social paradigms. Along with disconnecting spirituality from social and ethical action, the patriarchal traditions have mired themselves down in sexual and power abuses, discrediting spirituality as a whole. The time has come for the long-suppressed feminine to rise and bring us into balance.

The Divine Feminine, in its highest expression, embraces and reconciles all the oppositions that divide us, the schisms of mind and body, the borders that set us apart. As the Mother of all, She is our very Source: all existence is Her creation, borne of Her infinite fertile space, in visible forms and invisible, life here on Earth and beyond. Though She is formless and ageless, She encompasses all space and time. She is not only the Earth as opposed to the sky, immanence as opposed to transcendence, but that which interconnects both: the union between life on Earth as we see it and the unseen, unborn, unchanging dimension that gives it birth, sustains it and re-absorbs it into Herself. It is She that delivers us, into this life, and beyond it. She is the Mother who never ejects us from her infinite body.

Embracing this all-inclusive spirit of the feminine re-unites us not only with our own Source, but with our Earth and each other. As macro-cosmos, so micro-cosmos; as the feminine spirit rises, so do women and girls. Along with like-minded men, they are rising up and leading the way to the healing of our global society, a true evolutionary re-birth. Women, especially women of color, are offering new progressive platforms, addressing climate change, racism and social injustice, such as the New Green Deal promoted by Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. Greta Thunberg and youth worldwide are standing up with consummate courage, confronting the powers-that-be with the truth of our crises and demanding radical change.

The spirit of the Divine Feminine demands that we care just as much about our precious Earth and each other as we do about the Infinite, because we are all expressions of That – Her Creation, and Her own Self. This, the highest avatar of the feminine spirit of interconnectedness, especially called for in these times, heals and transcends all division. Today it is powering a wave of rapidly rising action, non-violent but uncompromising in its demands, despite and in response to the backlash from the bastions of power. We are seeing an upwelling of passion, compassion and truth-telling such as we have not seen for years, a new culture of fierce love.

The Divine Feminine is a portal to the all-inclusiveness of our true being, the fullest expression of our true non-duality. Through that door we come home, to who we always are and have been -- the infinite Consciousness that is the ground of all being, the Whole. It is only through this deep recognition that we are already Whole, that we can heal the brokenness of these end-times, and transform them into a new beginning, stepping across the threshold of our assumed identities into our own true divinity, from our long dream of exile to our eternal home.

Lastly, I'd like to propose two ways that we can help accelerate this global transition to unity: the Spheres of Co-Creation, an online collaborative model; and the Shakti Centre Global, a sacred activist ashram. Both aim to bring about the union of inner and outer transformation, community and cooperation, on-line and on the ground.

Designed to foster the global transition to a sustainable, cooperative and just society, the Spheres of Co-Creation is a model depicting a spectrum of seven spheres of our being, from the innermost of eternal Consciousness to its outermost complex expressions: from Consciousness, Energy, Psyche/Worldview, Ecology, Economy, Socio-Political Governance, to the Planetary/Cosmic levels. It will also function as an active database: organizations working at all these levels can enter themselves online in the model, find each other and collaborate for planetary transformation.

The Shakti Centre would likewise combine both inner and outer dimensions, addressing the individual as well as local and global levels. Workshops and retreats would include non-dual meditation; energetic, holistic healing; sharing circles; compassionate communication and collaborative processes; ecological, community projects; research and outreach for global systems-change.

Both projects would enable those working on the inner and outer planes to come together, enlarge their horizons, and work in synergy as a unified movement. Both would also converge with the still larger, growing "movement of movements" today, bringing together diverse issues and factions into united action. Please join us! Let's come together and harness the power of unity, our own deepest true nature, to heal ourselves and our planet, resurrecting the sacred in our world.

In these critical times, we are called to a new spiritual paradigm: non-dual in its basis, sacred activist in its expression, feminine in its all-embracing spirit. Recognizing the unity between formlessness and form is the hallmark of a mature spirituality, both personally and in our greater culture. The formless, infinite Source of our Being can then in-form our thoughts and our actions, accelerating our evolution from the deepest perennial wisdom. Our actions become a celebration of the miracle of creation, in all its myriad, diverse forms, and their undying Source.

A true non-dual vision is not in conflict with caring for this world, with consummate love and wisdom. We are called to something, ultimately, beyond this world we see, but first we have to answer the call to cherish this world, in all its sorrows and beauty, before its horizons can open up and we can step through, free.

Many of those who understand the full danger of the crises are scrambling now, looking for ways to protect themselves, to save themselves and their own. Maybe, for a short time, this can work. But, ultimately, I believe, the only ark that can save us from the storms of these times is the infinite ocean of love itself that is our own true being, breaking through and flooding us with its light. The climate crisis is an ultimatum -- for us to act, in love with all we hold sacred, before it is too late; it may also be our ultimate rite of passage, if we can rise to its call.

¹ For a first prototype of the model, see <http://transformthesystem.net/spheres.cfm>. Also see links to “A Holarchic Model for a Global Citizens Movement” and “Manifesto for a Movement of Movements” <http://transformthesystem.net/manifesto.cfm>

² See <http://shakticentre.blogspot.com>