

From Interfaith to Interspirituality and Beyond

Most indigenous communities and the founders of the many faiths across the world have clearly experienced the subtle presence that is within all forms of life and attributed their creation to the Supreme Being, known by many different names. Those who came after and developed a religion to sustain and communicate the original teachings often developed a certain orthodoxy from which a religion subsequently developed which stuck closely to beliefs and practices that perpetuated the outer or exoteric forms. Over time different understandings began to emerge until fundamental differences prevailed so groupings with a specific understanding developed into denominations or sectarianisms of many different kinds until today there are about 4,500 Christian groupings, eight different branches of Islam, three key branches of Buddhism divided into numerous sects, four main branches of Judaism, and all together an estimated 4000 different religious traditions.

Whilst this great diversity existed at the exoteric level there has fortunately been an esoteric or hidden, inner stream trickling through the ages based largely on the deeper insights of many mystics. It has been the mystics with some direct experience or a deep inner knowing who have been the early seeds of a new kind of spirituality that is more widely emerging for us today. Hildegard of Bingham from her twelfth century abbey sang with the joys of the soul which came from a deep inner sense that *“Everything that is in the heavens, on earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, and penetrated with relatedness”* and that *“the music of heaven is in all things”*. Another mystic from the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas, proclaimed: *“the human soul is capex universi”*, in other words capable of containing the whole universe and in the fourteenth century Joan of Arc was even burnt at the stake for heresy for declaring to an established inquisition that her own direct experience and inner knowing was God speaking to her.

Orthodoxies have been important for many for whom a particular set of beliefs have been integral to their own sense of identity or maintained by those seeking to develop a religion as a means of control, or those feeling the need for some certainties during times of stress or change as are being experienced today.

However, a parallel stream has been developing which has prioritised the value of direct experience and inner knowing and has especially been expressed by poets and dramatists. The seventeenth century Alexander Pope wrote that *“the world is one stupendous whole, whose body nature is and God the soul.”*

The period of the late 19th century must have been a time of renewed insights that we are all souls on a human journey and that despite the prevalence of an overlay of materialism, especially since the industrial revolution and increasingly technocratic society, that has meant that according to William Wordsworth

*“The world is too much with us, late and soon,
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers,
Little we see in nature that is ours.”*

Clearly he could see the onset of the dark satanic mills and how they were going to crush a spiritual awareness. Such thoughts were possibly behind the setting up of the first world parliament of religions in Chicago in 1893 and the memorable final speech given by Swami Vivekananda who proclaimed, *“All power is within you, you can do anything and everything.”* This may possibly have contributed to the inspiration that Francis Younghusband received to set up the World Congress of Faiths in 1936.

As someone who was fortunate to be present for the Second World Parliament of Religions in Bangalore, India in 1993 my overriding impression was that those giving lip service to the importance of dialogue and exchange were still fixated on promoting their own particular faith as a priority.

Also present at that event was Revd. Marcus Braybrooke who has written many books on the journey of faith and initiated different interfaith initiatives that have been helpful in carrying this energy forward. It was he who became involved with the World Congress of Faiths and in the 1980s invited me to assist him. I have fond memories of a trip that was organised to Leicester where we were able to visit different churches, a Jewish temple, a mosque, a gurdwara and spoke with many people for whom their tradition was a key aspect of their identity.

Today there is a growing movement for an emerging new spirituality that transcends and includes the faith traditions, and many people declare themselves to be ‘spiritual but not religious’. Much of this new awareness is based on the shift that can possibly be attributed to the award winning scientist Max Planck in the early twentieth century

who understood that all matter was based on a force that held the particles of an atom together and that *"We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter."*

Possibly it was his work and that of Albert Einstein that paved the way for the coming together of science and religion that lay the foundations of a spirituality that could be comprehensive. This could have been furthered by the American genius Nikola Tesla who was working on showing that everything in the universe is radiating energy and vibrating at different frequencies before he died prematurely. It has taken several decades since his passing for the idea of different frequencies of energy forming the basis of different dimensions of experience to be explored by those with an interest in what was being called new age thinking.

So much of our current society seems solely focussed on the third dimension in which all and everything that we can touch, feel, taste happens at a material level and from the point of view of much of the mainstream media it all ends when we die. Our awareness of the spiritual realm which the seekers of profit, power and control seem to largely ignore, or at best pay lip service to, now needs to be communicated more widely. It is only as individual or institutional awareness becomes aware of more subtle levels of being that the fourth dimension will also be respected. Many of the young generation have been trekking to India to find this subtle something but awareness is growing in the West and because it is a subjective experience it cannot be easily labelled but can be observed by an increasing desire to live in harmony with other people and the natural world.

However, many are seeking out others on a similar wave length. Those accessing a fourth dimension of feeling and deep thought are then linking in what is being called a fifth dimensional frequency in which all flows in a harmonious whole, synchronicities occur and there is a trend towards synthesis and deep inter-connectedness. The visionary Sir George Trevelyan in the 1970s and 80s glimpsed and spoke of these energies as having a dynamic and creative nature and giving rise to a spiritual and holistic worldview that recognises that everything on some level is alive and all is part of an amazing whole. His advice was to remember that we are each *"watched over by our higher self and angel guide and that, if we attune to this higher power, we shall have our part to play in the building of a new world"*.

By this higher power Sir George was referring to the Divine essence that is imminent within all life. Doubtless the founders of many different faiths had experienced something similar and, like Samuel in the Old Testament, could each day say *'Speak Lord, thy servant heareth'*. What we now know is that we too can trust that our inner voice will help guide us and keep us on track with our own soul purpose for this incarnation.

Many relatively new groupings have enabled people to find a spiritual home. One of these was The Wrekin Trust that Sir George ran in the 1970s and 1980s and which gave birth to several initiatives. One such initiative was the One Spirit Alliance which in its early days connected 46 different groupings and still provides a useful online presence that demonstrates the diverse expressions of spirituality (www.onespiritalliance.net). Sir George also held the first conference for Mystics and Scientists, which has grown into the Scientific and Medical Network (www.scimednet.org) which continues to support the fundamental connectedness of all life and explores many facets of all that is underway.

Hence spirituality is growing as a restored dimension of life today and shifting us away from the present tendency of demonization and upwards towards a growing divinisation. It was the Catholic priest and Mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who first foresaw the growing trend of complexity and coherence that would accompany our next evolutionary steps. It is estimated that there are now tens of thousands of new religious and spiritual movements world-wide (NRMs) and that some are very large such as the Brahma Kumaris (www.brahmakumaris.com) which was founded 90 years ago and has centres in over 400 countries teaching meditation and raja yoga to many thousands of students.. More recently newer and smaller groupings have been getting going such as the Holomovement which is bringing together people who are working for a world that works for everyone in which all our talents, arts, and creativity can be coordinated in service of the highest good for all.

The evolutionary pulse ever moves us on, often in significant periodic waves. The 1960s could be seen as the start of a new wave with the Beatles bursting onto the music scene with their song 'All you need is Love', President Kennedy having the vision to land a man on the moon thus initiating the exploration of our solar system and beyond and the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland began pioneering ways of living in harmony with God's will and laws and demonstrated how spirituality could be lived in practice. The three founding principles for living in holistic and spiritual way were:

Inner listening. This involves cultivating a deep quiet through daily meditation and seek inner guidance from 'the still, small voice' that speaks within our own thinking.

Co-creation with the intelligence of nature enabling collaboration with nature spirits, devas, and the ecosystem which leads to ecological harmony and a more conscious way of life.

Work is Love in Action - a principle that considers any task as an opportunity to be undertaken with love, dedication and joy, and so turns work into a form of spiritual service.

A new vision of how life could be was emerging and was given some credibility by Marilyn Ferguson in her publication in 1980 of "the Aquarian Conspiracy"(1) which gave greater awareness of an alternative spirituality and holistic health provision in a peaceful world where everyone is safe, healthy and prosperous, leaders are well meaning and honest, and real justice can occur. This vision was forming the basis of a new underpinning narrative, or paradigm and it was at the Findhorn Foundation that the first New Story Summit was held in 2014. This conference was evidence that the new story was already global in its reach as all 320 places were filled in the first week of registration. These included 50 indigenous elders from every continent, and 50 young people were given subsidised places.

While the mainstream media continued to focus on the dark and difficult aspects of contemporary life, magazines such as Positive News, and Resurgence focussed on publishing all that is good beautiful and true, young people everywhere were seeking jobs in the field of caring and people everywhere were beginning to live in ways that are more conscious of a greater whole and the need to restore the natural world. In 2018

the environmentalist and social change activist Paul Hawken published a book (2) "Blessed Unrest" highlighting the largest unnamed social movement in history that has been restoring grace, justice and beauty to the world and that no one saw coming. He termed this an unnamed movement as the most diverse that the world has ever seen, that flies under the radar of the media, has no central ideology, no initiator starting it but is spreading a new worldview across the world. He took this as a sign that the people of earth are waking up but it was now for us all to decide how will we have the capacity to respond and follow what deep down we know that humankind needs to do.

At a similar time the cosmologist and scientist, Dr. Jude Currivan, one of the group of evolutionary leaders, co-founded a grouping to explore and communicate the 'Whole world view' (www.wholeworld-view.org) and was circulating a unitive narrative that is increasingly being taken up as a guideline for decision making by the United Nations and the CEO's of many major corporations. She has also written a piece on the Science of Love and is speaking at a weekend event organized by the Scientific and Medical Network on "Towards an Age of Enheartenment".

Recognising that as a society we need to become more heart centred, this new philosophical concept challenges us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world and our role as stewards of the earth. If God, is no longer an old man in the sky but is inherent in nature itself, then it becomes a sacred duty to honour and protect the environment, recognising that every tree, every animal, and every ecosystem is a manifestation of the divine. This shift in perspective can inspire us to cultivate a deeper sense of reverence and responsibility towards the natural world, fostering a harmonious coexistence with all living beings. As we embrace a holistic perspective, we are called to recognise the sacredness of all life forms of life and the interconnected web of existence that binds us all together.

All of this are signs of a growing a movement for interspirituality. This term was first coined by Wayne Teasdale in 2016. This is a universal spirituality that focusses on common mystical experiences, that transcend specific religious beliefs but prioritises inner transformation and compassionate action. Maybe a growing movement of movements can enable people to come together and form a kind of murmuration which is no longer organisational but vibrational. We then may begin to see this as an evolutionary emergence from the interfaith and inter - religious work done in the 20th century. As it emerges it focuses on the common ground of shared wisdom, shared values such as love, compassion and the deep interconnectedness of all expressions of the one life. As this movement grows the current overemphasis on material and financial progress regardless of the well-being of people and planet will hopefully begin to fade and the religious traditions and belief systems which used to be at odds with each other can begin to generate a movement of movements. This could come at a time when we realise that the lies and distortions that have kept us in a sense of separation and duality are beginning to shift towards a time of caring about our essential unity. The awakening that is underway

demonstrates that we are steadily evolving towards a universal spirituality that includes but also transcends all the religious traditions and belief systems that were previously at odds with each other. As this new era starts to manifest, and we are lifted from the illusion of materialistic thinking and its accompanying competitive and conflictive ways of being, we will move towards living in harmony with all that is and set about co creating a new era based on spreading love light, beauty, goodness and truth as the basis of all our relationships. A vision ahead for us was outlined by the evolutionary visionary Barbara Marx Hubbard :

“A universal human is one who is connected through the heart to the whole of life, attuned to the deepest intelligence of nature and called forth irresistibly by Spirit to creatively express his or her gifts on the evolution of self and the world. Above all, a universal human has shifted identity from the separated ego self to the deeper self that is a direct expression of service. To become a universal human is to evolve consciously, choosing a path of development that has never been mapped before in a world that has never existed before.”

This vision, which was once only held by a kind of counterculture, is beginning to spread, sustaining many through current global challenges. As Dr. Anne Baring writes in her magnum opus “The Dream of the Cosmos: A Quest for the soul” (3)

“We are awakening to what I have called the Dream of the Cosmos-the dream of an enlightened humanity engaging in a new role for this planet: a role that is in harmony with the evolutionary intention of the cosmos.....As we begin consciously to align ourselves with this luminous ground of reality, our minds will serve the deepest longing of our heart, the deepest wisdom of our soul. We will know who we are and why we are here”

We will also feel grateful for all the steps taken by those who have gone before that enable us to now become the torchbearers of a spirituality for a new era. Our task ahead will be to regenerate our relationships with all forms of life. In this way we can begin to co create a new world as outlined by Charles Eisenstein in his book ‘*The more beautiful world that our hearts know is possible*’. (4)

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1 Ferguson, Marilyn, The Aquarian Conspiracy 1980, pub. Jeremy P Tarcher

2 Hawken, Paul, Blessed Unrest, 2018, pub. Penguin Publishing

3 Baring, Anne, The Dream of the Cosmos, 2013, pub. Archive Publishing

4 Eisenstein, Charles, The More Beautiful World our Hearts Know is Possible, 2023, North Atlantic Books.