

Treading Lightly on the Earth

“Walk softly upon this Earth, giving what you can and taking only what you need” -Buddha

An Event to honour the UN World Environment Day

at Global Cooperation House.

2 - 5.30pm Sunday 3rd June 2018

REPORT

BK Maria Faundez, who had organised the event, welcomed everyone. She introduced the Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative and how it has been encouraging green initiatives at all the Centres across the world. The afternoon was dedicated to the World Environment Day, 5th June, and the focus this year is to ‘beat plastic pollution’. Maria mentioned that a slogan of the Brahma Kumaris is ‘when we change the world changes’. She hoped the afternoon would inspire each of us to make positive changes in our life.

A minute’s silence to send peaceful vibrations to the world was held before **BK Thiru Seelan** performed a dramatic dance; demonstrating the beauty, harmony, peacefulness and coolness of nature. But demonstrating also the sudden unpredictability and explosive power of natural forces to create chaos, as a result of human behaviour. Thiru is an Indian, classical and contemporary dancer who is studying for an MA in dance movement psychotherapy.



BK Nik Haddadi, a facilitator in social change, facilitated the discussion that took place between:

- **Catherine Allinson**, Founder and Director of Future Earth Ltd;
- **Dharmachari Sanghasiha**, Teacher at the London Buddhist Centre and Deep Ecology retreats Leader; and
- **Sister Jayanti**, European Director of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, who has headed the BK delegation for the UN Climate Change Conferences since 2009.

Each speaker spoke for 10 minutes; sharing their perspective on how we can tread lightly on the earth.



Catherine (some points)

- There has been a huge increase in world population since 1970. We are now 7.6 billion.
- We understand, use and, sadly, also deplete our four spheres: air, water, land and all the living species in the planet.
- She also mentioned how 25,000 living species are, at this time, critically threatened with extinction due to human activity.
- We over-use our resources. We used to be in tune with nature, but we have somehow lost that ability to feel and to listen to the Earth and its rhythms.
- The aboriginals used to navigate across Australia in search of water. No-one can explain how they did it but they managed to feel where water was.
- The native American Indians know more about watersheds and their management than any technical university in the United States, and they've never read a book
- We are all related, connected but we've been blind to this deep connection we have with one another. We have lost our balance. In this part of the world, we have been focusing on market driven economics and have forgotten that human happiness and fulfilment is based on social and environmental harmony.
- Earth is a self-regulatory system; a living organism that finds its own balance.
- It is our transcendent capabilities that we need for our planet – the mental and spiritual connection that is felt when we care for and love each other.
- Every atom on this earth is a resource. We shouldn't waste anything. We should use everything sustainably. It is our responsibility to do what we can to find the inner stability to use them sustainably.
- Earth Overshoot Day is when we use more than one planet's worth of resources.
- We are using far more than we should.
- 93,000 billion tons of resources, excluding water, enters the global economy each year to provide for our food, energy, houses, clothes, everything that we use. Each day, I use half my weight. We are piling up the waste in the world.
- Use of plastic. It's estimated that 93 billion tonnes of plastic have been produced since the 1950's. Approximately 480 billion plastic bottles were sold in 2016; nearly a quarter of those by the Coca Cola company.
- It takes 450 years for those bottles to biodegrade. Imagine the pollution we are creating just through the use of plastic bottles.
- We throw things away before they have reached the end of their life. We call them waste, but we could make things out of them. We should use our ingenuity.
- If we lose the earth's topsoil this planet will end up looking like the moon...a barren desert.
- Yet we are also increasingly aware of our actions. It is what we are doing to refine that behaviour and awaken our consciousness that's really important for how we sustain life on Earth.
- In 2015, economist Geoffrey Sachs led a number of working groups to launch the sustainable development goals, our common vision to help all people live happy, healthy lives by 2030.
- We have the Paris agreement, thanks to Christina Figueres who has been speaking up for and driving awareness of climate change. She and Geoffrey Sachs are extraordinary people who have been getting the globe on board to agree on agendas like this.

- On a more local level, Opportunity Peterborough is part of the “circular economy”. The Peterborough Pledge meant that all businesses and the City of Peterborough came together to agree that they would make their city “circular”. That means not wasting things; keeping everything that comes into Peterborough in Peterborough, for as long as possible. They do this in a very practical way: they come together to share those resources, whether it is office space, a place on a training course, chairs, skills, and everything you need to run a small business. It is a fantastic little operation that’s making inroads at a city level.
- The most important things we can do is
 - To act;
 - To do a life audit, have a look at
 - how you shop,
 - how you travel,
 - how you eat and
 - See if you can make a few shifts, just to tread a little more lightly on Earth.
 - To reflect, to think very deeply how we engage with each other and with the environment and to spend more time in it, even if it’s raining.
 - To engage with each other, with your family, and tell them how you feel when you are out in the rain.

Sanghasiha

- I’m a humble meditation teacher. I’m not a scientist or campaigner but I do have a deep conviction that, as spiritual practitioners, we have an essential part to play in meeting the environmental crisis.
- Deep ecology begins and ends with wonder and we ought to consider life, indeed our very existence, as a flowing current.
- Arne Naess (Founder of Deep Ecology movement) held that the natural order has intrinsic value that transcends human values.
- Big ecological problems cannot be resolved by a capitalist society but only by recognising the intrinsic value of all forms of life and the environment, rather than utilitarian rules or market values.
- We don’t say that every living being has the same value as a human, but that it has an intrinsic value that is not quantifiable; that is not equal or unequal. It has a right to live and blossom.
- Deep Ecology points to profound truths about our relationship to ourselves, to one another and the world.
- Deep ecologists believe we need to renounce the idols that set us apart from nature. Idols of technology, capitalism, and militarism, patriarchy, materialism, the consumer society and the increasing sophistication of our own lives.
- In the West in particular, we are often engaged in a utilitarian relationship with the natural environment. That has led us directly, and continues to lead us, towards the despoliation of the earth. This is at the cost of our own spiritual, ethical, physical, and psychological reduction and perhaps even our eventual extinction.
- The pagan and animist world views have a sense of connectedness with life on earth. They pay reverence to the natural world.
- If we surrender to the earth’s intelligence we will rise up rooted like trees.
- Connecting to a sense of mystery and the magical is essential.

- Humanity needs to know that an inability to explain something rationally does not disprove its existence. We have to recognise that, in addition to rational thinking, our minds are capable of other more powerful mental processes. These lead us to intuitively grasp a tiny sparkling fragment of reality.
- The murmur of nature is always there; the trees rustling, the peacocks screaming and tigers roaring. We ignore this connection to nature at our peril.
- It seems that if we continue to be intoxicated with our economical and psychological processes, we are like the active alcoholic or addict. Then we stumble blindly into the future thinking that we can go on in our madness indefinitely. We believe that somehow our behaviour does not affect the world around us; that we are somehow separate from it. This has led to greater divisions and inequalities within our own species, economically, politically, and socially. Wealth and power is increasingly concentrated on the select few individuals, corporations, and ruling elites.
- Our separation from the natural world has left us further spiritually and resource depleted. That depletion has divided us further still.
- Because we are sentient, we are responsible. We know our actions have consequences. We may not be aware of those consequences or we may deny their effects, but we are still responsible. Our actions affect every single part of the globe and every eco system.
- Every creature knows when a hawk is cruising or a human is strolling. This information is passed through the system. It is called intelligence.
- We need to pay attention to what's going on; to wake up, to listen, to see, to feel, to touch, to wonder.
- The question is not now one of progress or even sustainability but one of withdrawal and retreat if we are to survive.
- There is a saying that 'if we are afraid to get close to the pain of the world then we will be banished from its joy too'.
- Here's what we can do:
 - raise awareness,
 - campaign,
 - lobby,
 - live a meaningful life,
 - take only what we need,
 - research,
 - question,
 - educate ourselves and others,
 - engage more deeply with our spiritual practice,
 - stay connected with a sense of love and wonder through the cultivation of mindfulness.

Sister Jayanti

Sister Jayanti gave thanks to Thiru, for the amazing dance; to Catherine for the powerful statistics and information and to Sanghasiha for the beautiful poetry he shared.

- The dignity of an enlightened soul is seen through its contentment. Dadi Janki, who is 102, continues to demonstrate this and show us how spirit can also harmonise matter.



- The discontent people carry today, that empty space, may filled with acquisition of property, devices, clothes, shoes; all the things that are part of consumerism and materialism.
- The root of distress and discontent is being out of touch with our own inner world and the being within. When we do come back to this awareness we re-discover the contentment and dignity we carry within and this changes life in an important way.
- If even a small fraction of the world moved

towards a simpler way of life and changed their diet, then a lot could change. These are two very practical solutions to the problems of the world,

- Dignity comes from knowing, valuing, and respecting the self.
- When I value myself, I am able to respect myself. To do this, I need to know myself, to come back to the inner identity rather than the external form. I need to make a connection with my spiritual identity and see the values that I carry. It works inside out. When there is self-respect, I am able to respect other humans and see them as part of my family. I am then able to respect all forms of life, all aspects of nature and the world around me.
- The word ecology is the study and understanding of my home. My first home, the home of the soul is this sacred chariot, this vehicle of mine, this home of mine, the body.
- As the living being, living within this home provided to me by nature, I need to be very careful how I use it and what I use it for. Within this ecology I tread lightly. Am I thumping the earth when I move or am I stepping lightly? When I am feeling light, happy, and easy, I move in a light way. The inner being is seen in the outer. Can I treat this home of mine with love and respect knowing that it offers a very important shelter?
- Am I able to treat this planet, which is our home, with equal love, respect, and care?
- It is said that no species pollutes its own nest, except the human species.
- All the faith traditions have taught people the value of respect, particularly respect for nature. Today we have forgotten those simple things. For example, giving a prayer before a meal or a thanksgiving after for nature's provisions and thanking the One who has allowed that to happen.
- Also, we don't need to think so much. We can create space to come back to those sacred moments of quiet at dawn, when we eat, and in the evening to come back to silence, to our own inner world. Then, we appreciate the beauty within, as well as in nature.
- There is a direct link between consciousness and climate. My awareness impacts my attitude, which impacts my vision, which impacts my actions, hence the culture and world that I live in.
- Natural resources have been reduced to their commercial value. The forest is no longer a source of beauty or a resource of nature. It has become only timber. Clearing the wood has provided grassland to feed cattle, or space for a road. Everything has been reduced to pounds and pence, yet this is not what life is about. The truth, the beauty of life, the love and happiness we experience are not commercial!

- Returning to a spiritual understanding of who I am and my relationship with nature, has been penetrating the Climate Change conferences. Christina Figueres is amazing, and she has been encouraging interfaith representation into all the different panels of the conferences.
- She noted at one conference that what this small group of faith leaders are doing at the conferences is connected to the heart and the heart is important and of value, in consideration of the planet.
- The momentum of human consciousness and awareness is moving faster, and people are understanding about changing what happens in here.
- It is our responsibility what we do when we go out and buy things.

There followed a question on the reality of interconnectedness: It is about being kinder. This is the concept of non-harmful action. It is about being honest, about being connected. It is about being active; maintaining contact, being silent. Harmony is created by first sorting out my feelings, my conscience and align them with the highest values within through silence, reflection and meditation. Then life will be filled with a sense of safety, security, compassion, and benevolence.

Sanghasiha then closed the first half of the afternoon with a beautiful meditation on mindfulness and encouraged everyone to 'rest in awareness'.

After the tea break, BK Sharon O'Reagan led some holistic exercises. Afterwards, everyone gathered to the song of 'walk gently on the earth'. A five-minute audio visual was shown explaining the extraordinary thermal solar power plant that became operational last year in India: India One.

Nik Haddadi then asked everyone to reflect on a comment made earlier: That the dignity of a human being can be seen in their contentment. He then asked everyone to discuss in small groups: How can we make our relationship with nature more harmonious?



Suggestions came up such as reducing waste and giving things a longer life, deciding to have oat milk and not buying another plastic bottle this year.

The speakers then reconvened for a question and answer session. Some of the main points were:

- To those that don't believe in climate change we would say, think not of yourself but reflect on how you would like your grandchildren to experience the earth. Although certain actions might be safeguarding jobs and growth, what is it safeguarding in terms of happiness and experience?
- It is important to understand that carbon is only a measure. Carbon is natural. We use it, the birds, bees and the trees use it. It's the pollution that is the problem, for example airplanes put carbon in

the wrong place, in the stratosphere. We need to be more considerate and mindful of our means of transportation.

- How many people walk more than 15 mins to anywhere?
- The earth is always in flux and is a combination of continuous processes. The ecosystems' cycles are constantly in flux; everything is in motion. Do we want the change to happen at such an extreme rate, which usually affects the poorest and the most vulnerable first? For example, dramatic rising sea levels, loss of livelihood, angry hurricanes. Do we want to cope with the world in that state of dramatic flux? Or do we prefer the periods of calm in between, which are also changing? I prefer to use the term climate variability because climate is always and will always change.
- How can we move away from our obsession to rationalise things? We need to connect with the mystical and the archetypal, to have a sense of beauty.
- Joy is gained by reconnecting with a sense of spiritual longing that's there for my own benefit and that of others. It manifests itself in connecting with the magical, the mythical, the archetypal. For something to be spiritually true, it doesn't have to be rationalised, tested, seen, touched, or quantified in any way.
- Is it possible to quantify the beauty of a rose? There is no way we can quantify it, and that shows me that rationality doesn't always explain everything.
- For a healthy life, we need to get out into nature more, to spend time being still in nature, in silence.
- Spending time in nature, silencing the mind, can increase productivity, clarity, and our ability to discern and resolve problems.
- What I do see is that people go into nature to find something. Mystics have searched for God in the mountain tops and forests. Nature and the Divine are deeply connected. Nature plays an important part in all of that.
- Nature is everywhere, we just have to open our eyes. It is an internal attitude we can develop.
- When I get a spiritual awakening, I get a sense of liberation and feel deeply connected with who I am, while at the same time surrendering to something bigger than myself, more powerful and mysterious.
- We can diminish the pull of material things by experiencing more happiness and love. Then we realise we don't need so much.
- When we appreciate our true inner nature, we can appreciate everything and everyone else.
- There are swathes of people all around the world who are working to keep us consuming goods and services in unsustainable and unethical lifestyles.
- The crisis the world is facing requires a spiritual response. We need to change ourselves and our awareness. It's a question of what is going on in here, inside ourselves.
- When a small minority of committed individuals come together it can create a 'critical mass' and there can then be a shift in consciousness.
- The world of peace has to come again. We have been through a long period of darkness and what is ahead of us is a long period of light.

Maria gave thanks to everyone for a full and fascinating afternoon and Sister Jayanti closed with a powerful meditation to walk lightly on the earth.

Toli and blessing cards were given out.

END