

CHANGING THE WORLD FROM THE INSIDE OUT

“Hear this, young men and women everywhere, and proclaim it far and wide. The Earth is yours and the fullness thereof. Be kind but be fierce. You are needed now more than ever before. Take up the mantle of change. For this is your time.” Winston Churchill

Our hyper-complex world is fraught with countless social and environmental challenges that fill us with anxiety and fear—for the present as well as the future. Most people wish to have a peaceful and compassionate world, but they are unsure what to do to create it and where to begin. Is entrusting external sources such as governments and social leaders the only thing we can do? Hardly so. Entrusting and enacting one’s own abilities brings far greater change than passively waiting for others to do it. We need to review who we are and of what we are capable. In order to do this, we have to start by reviewing whether the worldview that guides our life and our conduct is correct. New developments in science and the insights of Eastern philosophies offer guidance for this endeavor.

There is today a greater awareness than ever before of the countless subtle ties that link diverse phenomena in the world, such as global warming, migration, world hunger, religious intolerance and social disturbance. Interconnectedness and interdependence are increasingly acknowledged, yet, their true meaning is not fully understood and taken into consideration for individual and social change. Interdependence and interconnectedness on the social level mean the support of all others for our own and everyone’s survival. Every single meal we eat, each item of clothing we wear, as well as where and how we live, results from and has consequences for other people as well as other species and nature herself. Because we are so dependent on others and the environment, individually and collectively we have to take care of the well-being of all people and all species so as to safeguard our own individual and collective survival.

A real social transformation is only possible by personal transformation. Change begins with ourselves, our ways of life, our behaviors, aspirations and emotional responses to the issues we address. Changing the world has to be from the inside out.

The self-Interested Worldview versus the holistic Worldview

Self-interested behavior hallmarks the last few centuries. It stems from a worldview that alienates humans from each other, from nature and the cosmos. It considers the body as a machine in which organs and cells function as unconnected parts that can be replaced without affecting anything else within the body. It views the soul as a religious concept and sees the span of one's life as a finite and closed circuit. Selfish aims created consumerism; selfish tendencies regard us as being above nature, and one another's belief systems as superior to that of others. It created the desire for control over everything and anything. Nature is seen as a wastebasket just the same as our own bodies – into which we dump things indiscriminately. Large corporations produce the goods that we consume; therefore we are a part of the problem. Why are we so surprised at where we have arrived? Earth is rebelling by producing climate change; nations experience greater crime rates and gender and racial inequality and increased social disobedience, ill-health is rampant, animals are hunted for trophies — and so on. Living driven by a self-interested worldview is self-defeating and endangers humankind as well as the planet.

For many centuries, Eastern philosophies advocated and lived by a holistic worldview that considers all sentient beings and non-sentient things as part of a 'whole' that is intrinsically and subtly interconnected, where each thing affects every other in an integral way. According to Eastern tenets, humans are an integrated part of the cosmos, and the human body is a microcosm, which is not only governed by the same laws, but is also animated by the same forces—the forces that drive development in the cosmos. Human activities, whether social or individual, model themselves according to that which takes place on a macro-scale, and development in the cosmos has a huge impact on humanity. Cosmic harmony can only be maintained by harmony in nature, in the state, in the family, as well as in the human body and mind. Damaging any of these harmonies risks causing disorder in the whole. There is no dualism in Eastern wisdom; matter and spirit are one entity and are not separate, as they are in Western thought.

Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism are all advocates of the *discovery of oneself and of the experience of the infinite within each of us*. "There are as many infinities as there are dimensions, as many forms of liberation as there are temperaments. But all bear the same stamp. Those who suffer from bondage and confinement will experience liberation as infinite expansion. Those who suffer from darkness will experience it as light unbounded. Those who groan under the weight of death and transitoriness will feel it as eternity. Those who are restless will enjoy it as peace and infinite harmony."¹

Mindful practices, yoga, meditation, tai chi, chi kung, and the study of wisdom traditions are among the many approaches towards self-discovery. It is important to recognize that it is not material goods or financial status, which make us happy or define who we are. “We do not need to buy or own anything in order to be happy. At any moment, we can access this sense of joy. The same interdependence that makes our consumerism so devastating for the environment can also make the natural environment a source of endless joy and wonder to us, without taking away anything more than a lungful of air. It just depends on how we choose to live our connectedness.”ⁱⁱ

Meaningful livelihood can be achieved by living consciously, based on wholesome intentions and altruistic impulses. All human action needs to benefit nature, society, and one’s own self equally. To inquire into the workings of the world around us is just as important as inquiring into our inner world. To know ourselves truly, we have to bring our hearts and minds together while trusting our wisdom within. The Sufi mystic, Jalaluddin Rumi said that the ‘entire universe is inside you’. Discover the beauty, the talent and the magic of the universe that is YOU! The changes you make in your universe affect other universes. It is up to you what you change, and how and when you change it.

ⁱ Govinda, Lama Anagarika, *Foundation of Tibetan Mysticism* (Rider&Company, U.K., 1983)

ⁱⁱ The Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, *The Heart is Noble, Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (Shambhala Editions, 2013)