

Warmer Hearts Can Cool Warming Planet

"We have borrowed the future from our children instead of inheriting it from our ancestors." This African proverb vividly describes the contemporary use of natural resources. In the not-so-distant future the specter of global warming threatens to cause the melting of the polar icecaps and submerge many flourishing coastal cities under tsunami-like waves. And this is just one among many apocalyptic predictions - coming from, not religion, but science. A World Watch Institute report put it poignantly, "Environmental super-disasters are no longer a doomsday prophecy; they are an imminent reality."

Is there anything we can do to avoid these calamities? Some ecologists have proposed a 3 R formula: reduce, reuse and recycle. If we reduce our consumption, especially of non-biodegradable products, reuse the commodities we have instead of repeatedly purchasing newer ones and recycle the items we discard, we can avert the impending disaster or at least decrease its magnitude. Unfortunately most people are unable to muster the will to implement these measures as the temptations for instant gratification often appear irresistible. Moreover many people presume that as lone individuals they are too small to make any substantial difference in a global crisis and so they numb themselves with diversions.

But we can all make a difference. To make the 3 Rs realizable, we need another preceding R. That R is for raise; we need to raise our consciousness from the material arena to the spiritual realm. Those who see the whole socio-historical picture know that the current crisis originated from a lowering of human consciousness several centuries ago. For millennia before the Renaissance, people worldwide saw nature as a sacred Mother acting in tandem with the Divine Father to provide us our earthly home and bodily necessities. Indeed this worldview is stated explicitly in the Bhagavad-gita (14.4) and echoed in many other wisdom-traditions. Consequently people in the past reverentially took their necessities from nature and scrupulously avoided tampering with her balances, knowing those to be of an intricacy and delicacy beyond human comprehension. However when the reductionistic worldview depersonalized nature, seeing it as an inanimate, even inimical, object to be harnessed for human profit, then people started plundering natural resources indiscriminately. Thus began an unfortunate history of what has been euphemistically called "unintended consequences": myopic attempts to exploit nature that snowballed and boomeranged, eventually precipitating the present crisis. Srila Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON, succinctly described this phenomenon, "The sufferings of humanity are due to a polluted aim of life."



But this historical decline can be reversed. By raising our consciousness, we can regain our holistic vision of ourselves as spiritual beings, beloved children in the lap of our divine parents, nature and God. We will experience the non-material enrichment that comes by harmonizing with our deepest nature. The concomitant warming of the heart with divine love will nourish our willpower and enable us to eschew the indulgences that are ecologically harmful. Fortunately for us, the will to raise our consciousness is an individual and renewable resource. -Through time-tested spiritual practices like meditation, prayer, yoga and chanting of holy names, every one of us can raise our consciousness and thus make a small but significant difference. Will that be enough to save our planet? Why not?

The Gaia hypothesis, an emerging paradigm within modern science, posits that the earth is a conscious organism. In that light, the current ecological problems can be seen as her defensive responses to our excesses and abuses of her resources. Nonetheless she has a mother's heart; when she sees us reforming, she can save us in ways that we may not yet foresee. The earth, like all organisms, has a healing mechanism, which will promote recovery once the hostile stimuli are removed. So let us do our part by cleansing the ecologically hostile germs of godless materialism from our consciousness and nature will do her part.

