

Awaken or Perish

Dr. Ashok Gangadean talks to Big Picture about viewing the world through a broader focal lens

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There is a really deep crisis on our planet and it is usually difficult to see it because we tend to look at the world through our own lenses, our own culture, our own personalized perspectives. It requires us now at this point in our evolution to stand back from our particular world view and take a wider vista of many different alternative religious worlds and spiritual worlds and perspectives. When you do that, when you get into a more global perspective, a profound pattern begins to emerge that's really startling on the planet that you can't see when you are looking through a mono-centric lens. And that pattern is that the great spiritual wisdom, the great endowment of all the great spiritual traditions: North, east, west, south - across the spectrum, converge on the insight that humanity is in a painful shift, a difficult and deep evolutionary shift from egocentric patterns of processing world information for ourselves, to a deeper more integrated holistic way, a 'dialogic' way of being a human being. And the pattern that is revealed, that is seen by these great spiritual traditions, is that ego-centric mindedness as a pattern, as a technology of making ourselves and our world (you don't often think of technology as the way people use their minds), is the single most disastrous cause of manufacturing the human situation.

When you enter the global lens we begin to see that human beings make our worlds by how we use our minds. It's one of the great insights. The essence of Buddha's awakening is to see that "ego is to suffer". It is a stage in our evolution. When you get stuck in ego-mindedness – taking ourselves to be a separate existing entity and seeing our world from that angle of our culture, whatever it may be: our own ethnicity, our own perspective - it leads to fragmentation, polarization, separation, disintegration and is the source, ultimately, of the deepest forms of violence of all kinds. When you see that how you 'mind' matters, one sees that ego-mindedness produces and manufactures the disastrous situation that we have on our planet. The prescription for this, which has been seen by our great spiritual teachers, is that we don't have to 'ego-mind.' We have a choice. We can shift into a deeper, more integrative way. That takes us, in fact, into reality as it really is. Because the insight is that reality is a profound, unified, integrated dynamic, interactive field. When our patterns of thinking or "minding", or processing reality moves in the law-like way of that unified, integrative field, then we are in touch with reality. It's there that the moral consciousness, the compassion, the feeling of a connection and that the discovery in our hearts at our cellular level, that connectivity begins to come clear. Now, on the planet, we have reached a threshold where our choice is to awaken to this or perish. Our survival depends on it.

A world view is an "ecology of mind" that shows us everything about ourselves, the way we see ourselves and the lens through which we see our world. It's the ecology, the shape of my mental space. It is my world view: my religion, my culture, my ethnicity and

sometimes even my discipline if I am a scientist or someone in the academy - we see the world through that. And what has not been understood is that a world view as a conceptual space, as an ecology of mind, is profoundly different. If I am raised in the Judaeo-Christian mental space it takes great effort and skill, if I am able, to morph my mind into the Hindu way of seeing reality, or the classical Chinese way, or into the way of the Lakota Native American vision of reality. To shape, re-shape, re-morph our mind into a different ecology, a different conceptual space can reveal the world in a profound way. So it's not just the clash of religious worlds, it's the clash of world views – whatever they may be. So if it's Genesis or Big Bang – those are very different world views.

The irony is that the great founders of our world's religions saw the global shift to the dialogical way – seeing the self in the other, the way of compassion, the way of the Golden Rule. However, the practitioners of a religion tend to be stuck often in the mono-centric lens of seeing reality from this particular ego-lens or ego point of view that universalizes its own truth as a truth for all people. It's not able to make the shift to the dialogical global lens where we can really see the world open space, the multiplicity of alternative views. So, ironically, the crisis of our time is to see that religions that in their hearts should teach love and brotherhood and coming together under the divine, are often the deepest source of alienation and religious clashes.

So we see a difference in religions as practiced from this ego-centric fundamentalist, reductive way and, on the other hand, spirituality which is precisely transforming an awakening into this space of compassion and care and love. I think Jesus is a wonderful example of this shift to the global lens to the space of compassion; where you see yourself in the other, where you see yourself in the poor person, or the hungry, or the person in prison. And so when he said “when I was in prison you visited me, and when I was hungry you fed me”, when you enter this global lens you begin to have the profoundest compassion because you see yourself in the other. If our religions were practicing the script, that is at their core, in this way, then we would not have these religious clashes.

What is global spirituality? It is recognizing that there is a wide spectrum of spiritual traditions across the planet and through the ages. And if we can begin to open up our horizon and vista and begin to explore these and to see through these different lenses, reality opens in a profoundly different way. So then if you listen to Lao-Tzu in the classical Chinese tradition, he says “the Tao that can be named is not the Tao”. That powerful formula that opens up Lao-Tzu's great text, is saying that the holy name the ‘Tao’, the infinite word, cannot be named in the ego language and the ego way. To name it in the ego way is to violate the name. That tradition is echoed across the different traditions. In the Hindu version of that is to meditate on ‘Om’ – that infinite syllable, the infinite symbol of all symbols. It can never be spoken in the ego voice. It is the source of all names and all language.

In the dialogue of Krishna and Arjuna in the classical text the Bhagavad-Gita we find another wonderful role model of a deep dialogue, because Krishna is the voice of Om. Arjuna is the every-day person who has been impaled in this ego-centric lens, and therefore is in a war, a division of himself, a division of his family, a fratricidal war. That is the scene of the Bhagavad-Gita. So that as Arjuna drops his weapon, his conscience

pierces himself on the battlefield and the higher self begins to open up and he realizes 'it's not right to kill my own people'. And he drops his weapon and he says 'Krishna help me, I don't know what to do'. Krishna enters the dialogue, where the voice of Om, the higher voice, begins to dialogue with the Ego voice to help it move step by step from the ego place of Samsara, bondage, suffering and violence, to the place of the integrative compassion and moral law of 'Krishna consciousness'.

Buddha's essential insight is that ego is suffering, it is caused by ego attachment and desire, it can be overcome and it can be overcome through the right conduct of mind. Buddha was diagnosing that ego-mind is a source of suffering. And that the cure, the prescription (a medical prescription) is to transform and get out of the ego-technology and move into this space of emptiness, the space where all things meet, the space of fullness. And we do so through the right practice of the "Eightfold path". So Buddhist ethics is conducting our minds in a higher technology of right judgement, right thinking, right livelihood, right practice and so forth, which is rehabilitating the mind, literally, from the ego habits which are vices to the habits of the Dharma, or the moral law. I am giving you examples then, whether it's Lao-tzu or Krishna, or Buddha, or Jesus, or Moses...I think the heart of the Judaic tradition which starts out "Hear O Israel, love thy God with all thy heart and might" is asking us to put God first above the self and the Ego and the Ego needs. It is calling for the de-centering of the ego and the re-centering of every breath in terms of what is higher.

The challenge of our planet at this point in our evolution is the painful shift from the dominance of the ego-lens into the place of the global or dialogue lens; and our survival turns on that. I think that our great teachers and scriptures speak from the infinite word. It's no accident that our different traditions and indigenous traditions all point to something fundamental and first and infinite; there's a profound pull to that. And in science too, they talk about an ultimate energy or "unified field." So I see science as part of this spiritual journey to tap what is first and develop the tools and technology and language to process this unified field; where we find compassion, knowledge, democracy, ethics and the flourishing of human life.

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